

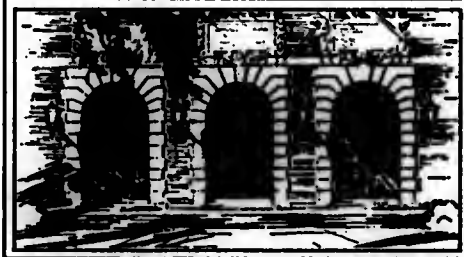
BABETTE BOMBERLINGS BRIDEGROOMS

By ALICE BEREND

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**B A B E T T E
BOMBERLING'S
BRIDEGROOMS**

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By

ALICE BEREND

Translated by MARGARET NOHOWEL

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Babette Bomberling's Bridegrooms

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**B A B E T T E
BOMBERLING'S
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BABETTE BOMBERLING'S BRIDEGROOMS

Life is not so easy for us humans. The dumbest animal fares much better.

When two asses meet, each knows he has met an ass. When two humans come face to face, it is long until they can decide exactly whom they are meeting. They cannot even decide whether they ought to shake hands.

For a mere name means little.

Only by his profession can one good citizen recognize another. We can feel the social assurance that follows positive knowledge only after we have discovered friend neighbor's economic status.

Innocently to believe nothing but the best of our fellow-beings is the honorable thing to do. It is even a duty. Thereby, however, we often encounter surprises. And surprises are rarely pleasant.

None of us is delighted when our attractive, rotund neighbor at the play (upon

Babette Bomberling

whom we had mentally conferred respectable retirement) suddenly introduces himself as a manufacturer of coffins, wholesale and retail. Disenchanted, we now gaze upon the elegance of his opulent, smiling help-mate, who is the livest possible evidence of the blossoming of his business. Even though the amiable soul had not confided to us in the intermission that his income increased from year to year, we would have fathomed as much.

It is our duty to hope that our neighbors' honest efforts be rewarded with the most bountiful harvest—indeed, life is not so easy for us humans.

No one was better informed on these intimate matters than Mrs. Anna Bomberling, *née* Kolpé. She, who had been the better half of a casket maker for twenty-one years, but who had still not learned to love her husband's flourishing business.

Though he really deserved her love.

For she owed to him a mode of living which far surpassed the maiden prayers which she once had evolved in her father's smithy, when the sparks flared and the rest-

Babette Bomberling

ive steeds of the village teamsters were equipped with new shoes.

Not only was she today the possessor of a genuine rabbit scarf, like the town clerk's young wife in the past, but she warmed herself with sable and chinchilla. Not only had she a handsome son; her Herman was even a student and consorted with the élite exclusively. Not only had she a sweet daughter with blond curls entwined with blue ribbons; her Babette was even so delicate, graceful and decorous that old Father Kolpé would most certainly have ordered his daughter to sweep out the smithy three times before so lofty a lady might be permitted to cross his threshold.

Anna also had a good, affectionate husband who stayed away from home all day; and still she was not happy.

And then experience does not make more palatable the sensation of noticing constantly that every acquaintance, as soon as he sets eyes on you, seems to be reminded of something distasteful. There is a sickly feeling when strangers, having exhumed

Babette Bomberling

your identity, start as though they were lacerated slightly by an invisible needle.

And the worst of it was that secretly Anna did not blame these people. Years bring experience. The older she grew, the better she understood others.

On gray, damp days, when she would sit in her perfectly warm, comfortable room, huddled together, fearing that gout and old age were coming over her, her husband would come home, fresh and hilarious, pinch her cheek and say: "Well, old girl, business is great!"

And on the way home from a subscription performance of one of those classical dramas in which the curtain falls upon a pile of corpses, when Bomberling, happy that the thing was over, would grow a bit sentimental, she no longer would giggle as in the past, but would give him a withering look for his lack of fine feeling and say:

"Let me alone. You're in league with the dead!"

Now, this was not quite accurate. For, in spite of his business, August Bomberling

Babette Bomberling

had not as yet actually seen a single corpse. That would have been as disagreeable to him as it is to every other human being.

Above all, there was nothing morbid about him. On the contrary. In his business he was conspicuous not only for his restless energy, but for the joviality which is a concomitant of self-righteousness and the regularity of all the functionings of the body.

No one left his store whom Bomberling did not himself accompany to the door and assure with a bow:

"It was indeed a pleasure; let me have the honor to serve you again."

But, unfortunately, a happy married existence can not be brought about by these virtues of industry and business honor.

August Bomberling soon noticed that at home he could not speak of the business matters which lay closest to his heart and still keep the family peace. And, more than anything else, he wanted peace. Therefore, he learned to remain diplomatically silent. This was not always a simple matter in the first years of his marriage; for friend wife

Babette Bomberling

soon began to dress herself more in keeping with the fashion journals from Paris than in accord with the state of Bomberling's books of account. But he loved his wife, and that helped some.

Nothing was disagreeable to him.

He could not understand what there was to object to in his business, which was honest and necessary.

He had come by it in the most natural way in the world. When his masterpiece as a carpenter was finished, he had looked down life's perspective for the way that would carry him forward most quickly. He sat on the sill of the workshop and sought to visualize the most staple article of his trade. Was there not something that everyone absolutely required, whether he would or no?

Many sat at a table. A wardrobe is seldom the property of one alone, and not everyone owns a bed. He himself had had to share his own with two small brothers.

A whistle burst from his lips—a different kind of bed had flashed before him. In this case there was no sharing. The poorest

Babette Bomberling

dunce got one for himself alone. He thought further. The longer he thought over the idea the more advantages occurred to him.

Here was an article that could not be exchanged. No bothersome repairing. No change in fashions. No smiling exit to "Think it over" after long deliberation. There was no use wriggling, you had to buy.

The tunes he whistled became more gay, while his thoughts danced. Grinning, he waved to slim, blond Anna Kolpé across the way. She was peeling potatoes in the house next to the smithy.

That evening he went to the blacksmith and confided his plans to him. He wished to start a coffin factory and to come for Anna when the business was going. Would the blacksmith risk a couple of thousand? Its success was a foregone conclusion and he enumerated the advantages of his practicable article on his fingers.

First: Everyone must have one, whether he wants one or not. Secondly: Exchange impossible. Thirdly: Repairs—here the

Babette Bomberling

smith interrupted that he would believe him without further details. He thought they had no such need in the village. With that he glanced over his shoulder, as one who feels a presence behind him. Such a thing was for the cities. He should surely have Anna if he succeeded. But for the thousands he must look elsewhere. Everything with moderation.

Bomberling thanked him, happy that he should have Anna if he made good, and rollicked off to his boss.

When he heard the newfangled idea of his pupil, he gave him the few thousand.

These young carpenter-journeymen, he decided, would be best disposed of in the city which was large and far away. He liked no competition.

Many horseshoes had been molded before Bomberling returned home.

Anna saw that August's moustache was thick and blond and his eyes blue and clear. She said to herself that he lived in the city where one was in the midst of life. What did she care about his stupid business, which was only for the dead.

Babette Bomberling

The wedding came. The following day they rode joyously off to the great city, the bridal-wreath in a round cake-box. Their baggage consisted of many boxes filled with new linen, a horseshoe embroidered into each piece for good luck. The little flat was four flights up, and slender Anna was proud of the large stretch of city she could see from her window.

Now this was all long past. With every turn of the dial the city had grown and the business of Bomberling's factory had kept step. Their apartment was on the smartest floor now, and they had become a part of the great metropolis. Even from a distance their clothes as well as their taut rotundity made it perceptible that they were people of affairs.

Anna Bomberling, the Madam now, had not the faintest recollection that one could expect the blessed, golden sun to dry red flannel drawers, (washed with green soap), upon an ordinary garden fence.

* * * * *

Seeing is believing.

Babette Bomberling

And in the home the Bomberlings now occupied, when their marriage was nearing the quarter century, there was nothing to remind one of smithy or carpentershop.

Even the old family portraits had disappeared, with their wide black frames of coffin-trimming rests from the factory.

Mrs. Bomberling had declared that she couldn't stand the old faces any longer and as usual Bomberling had acquiesced. It was indifferent to him what hung upon the wall. Only the large crayon drawings of his and Anna's parents had not gone to the attic, but together with a lot of flat-irons, decorated the laundry.

The decorator, who had contracted to do over the living-room in the height of taste, had assured them that most of his patrons were doing this. And he understood his business. He justly called himself "Specialist in Home-Culture".

The front rooms of Bomberling's apartment had become an example of modern art. They veritably breathed a dignified exclusiveness with their scent of the pre-

Babette Bomberling

vailing fashionable perfume to which was always discreetly added the fragrant gravy-smell of a huge roast.

Already in the hall lay a handsome Persian carpet that was genuine. Every visitor to whom Mrs. Bomberling whispered the price of this piece jumped as though someone had stepped on his little toe.

This overwhelming effect proved to Mrs. Bomberling that repression is rewarded. For she had not wanted the Persian carpet at all. She did not want to spend so much for an old rag full of Turkish vermin. She had thought an imitation would be cheaper and cleaner, and still give the same effect.

But the "specialist in good taste" had entreated, and thrown up his hands—hands with blood-blistered finger-tips, for even the most clever of us cannot always hit a nail on the head. With melancholy in his small, inflamed eyes, he had declared to Madam that she ought to have a real Oriental rug in the hallway. In the rear and in the rooms which they occupied they might have have as many imitations as they wished. *Noblesse oblige.*

Babette Bomberling

And Mrs. Bomberling had yielded; for she was not building this home in such grand style for pleasure. She had a set purpose.

Three period-perfect rooms adjoined the hall. The furniture in the drawing-room was from an old English castle. A Latin book, bound in old pigskin, always lay open on the sill of the wide bay-window. On the wall hung an old English engraving, depicting a formal garden in which a smiling young man was slipping an engagement ring upon the finger of a smiling girl of good family. Mrs. Bomberling exchanged a smile with this picture whenever she came through this pompous room, with its yellow silk curtains always drawn.

Otherwise she had much trouble with this fine salon. The maids could not understand that the Latin book must lie open on the beautifully carved sill. They slammed it shut every time they dusted, although they had been with the most distinguished families.

The drawing-room led into a tea-room. The principal attraction of that was the tea-

Babette Bomberling

cup collection of a Russian countess. There was a czar, or at least a grand duke, on every delicately enameled shell.

"If I only knew why we need all this!" Bomberling exclaimed, when they led him through the completed splendor of his home the first time. Anna did not answer. She only smiled upon the engraved pair on the wall.

Past the glass-encased cups, and between two pillars was the music room. This was dominated by the large grand piano at which Babette practiced. Looking like a huge and very superior candy box, upon a piece of brocade, rested the shiny mahogany case of Herman's violin.

Babette and Herman had inherited no musical talents.

Although it seemed superfluous to Anna, Bomberling still confessed quite candidly to everyone, that to him music was a noise like every other. Also that he preferred a locomotive whistle to a violin solo because it was shorter.

Anna, however, was deeply moved by every phonograph record.

Babette Bomberling

Besides, she knew that music is fashionable. Hence Babette played the piano and Herman fiddled.

So the music-room really belonged to the part of the house used by the family. That was evident too in the many flowers in vases all about; for Babette loved flowers and bought them wherever she saw them. Each week she brought new favorite blossoms which she declared the most lovely in the world, worn at her belt and on her jacket, and arranged in all the family rooms. Especially in her own. Here the hands of the decorating artist had not been permitted to disturb the many flowers midst the ivory-enameled furniture, the delicate curtains, bright mirrors and photographs of famous men.

Nor had the decorator been allowed in the adjoining room. Here Herman wished to live in his own disorder of books and papers, pipes, ink-wells, rapiers and a galaxy of heads of beautiful women.

With a long pipe dangling from his mouth and a tiny college-cap on his thick, blond mop, he had filled the frame of his

Babette Bomberling

door with his broad shoulders against the approaching specialist, and had notified him that all "specialists in good taste" were prohibited. Here the coming generation was already dominating.

And Babette and he laughed a long and merry duet. With quick strides the cutaway of the specialist disappeared at the end of the corridor. His shiny back mirrored smartly controlled rage.

Strange to say, with a deprecating smile, Mrs. Bomberling had also begged that the redecorating of the conjugal bedroom be left to her.

Nothing is beautiful of itself, only custom and usage make it so.

There are various well-loved comforts, which we will not sacrifice to modern life; Anna desired one room in which she might really feel at home.

The decorating artist had expounded to her in vain that a canopy bed was absolutely grotesque and antiquated, and that the fat, gilded angel floating over their beds was utterly inartistic and even anatomically deficient.

Babette Bomberling

Mrs. Bomberling remained firm. Even art must have its limits.

August had carved and gilded this angel for her in the long ago. She had always thought Herman resembled him a bit.

* * * * *

The pleasant large dining-room lay as a friendly intermediary between this zone of personal atmosphere and that of silent, cultivated splendor.

This room saw all the Bomberlings assembled most frequently. Oak furniture and leather chairs made it comfortable. The big grandfather's clock ticked firmly and decidedly in the corner. In the window a canary hopped in his cage. Mrs. Bomberling was very proud that Herman had named it Napoleon.

People are known by the company they keep.

There was dignity in her manner when she said to the maid, "Give Napoleon fresh seed."

A large still life hung on the wall. A gorgeous picture. It was not only painted by a world famous artist, but represented

Babette Bomberling

a genuine *paté-de-fois-gras de Strasbourg* surrounded by oysters, red lobsters, bunches of fresh asparagus and a bouquet of selected roses.

The art decorator had kindly called Mrs. Bomberling's attention to this picture, "to be had for a song from the estate of a banker."

Mrs. Bomberling had really thought it very expensive. She figured that the artist must have painted it at a season when these delicacies are particularly high. But she could not tear herself away from it. So it was bought and hung facing the dining-table. There it was surely appropriate. For art should be an inspiration.

Bomberling was always the first to enter this friendly chamber, after the breakfast table was set. He was an early riser, and each morning enjoyed anew the coziness of a brief hour alone.

First he would go to the window and look at the weather, which he always found fair. Then he would force a very round finger into the cage and beckon Napoleon, whom he called simply "Dicky" so early in the

Babette Bomberling

morning. And then the door would open, the maid with fresh cap and apron would enter, bidding a pleasant good-morning and set the bright coffee-pot upon the neatly set table.

The fragrance of coffee radiates comfort like sunshine.

Beaming, Bomberling sat down and fastened his little breakfast napkin in his collar, which, like a white ring, seemed to wedge his full neck to his double chin. Then he took up his knife for the attack.

Formerly, when the children were small, he had often captured them for a merry breakfast party. He had set Babette upon his knee and stroked her fair, silky hair, had laid her little white fingers on the broad back of his hairy hand, and had always marveled anew how daintily such little maids are formed. Or he had put fat Herman on his strong back and had run around the table. This they had called their merry-go-round.

But now the children were grown up and spoke learnedly. And he did not like being embarrassed when he ate.

Babette Bomberling

With a sure hand, Bomberling grasped his knife, carved a flat slice off the sausage and cut open his buns. Before combining bread and sausage, he would sip his strong coffee with audible enjoyment. Warming pleasantly, the hot fluid followed its dark course.

Our well being, however, does not depend entirely upon our own exertions.

Just as Bomberling pleasantly warmed within and without, chewing contentedly, was studying the illustration of the tomb of a late millionaire in his paper, the door in back of him opened, and wife Anna entered, in a pale blue morning gown, but without the greater part of her modern head-dress. She took her place opposite Bomberling and attacked her breakfast, with a remarkable lot of chatter and gossip. Frequently she cleared her throat loudly and even tapped her spoon against the cup as though she were about to deliver an official address. But Bomberling's attention remained fixed on millionaires' tombs and liversausage.

Even to her precisely intoned, "October is upon us, my dear August!" he did not

Babette Bomberling

turn his head, but riveted to his paper, said, between mouthfuls that he had sent the rent from his office.

We neglect to take note of the obvious. The pale blue shoulders shrugged disdainfully, and Anna observed that she had not gotten up so early to hear that.

Bomberling hastily laid down his napkin and lit his morning cigar. He was convinced that Anna would, as usual when they were alone for a moment, relate with relentless exactitude all she had had to endure all these years as the wife of a coffin manufacturer, and that she would not rest until she had helped her children into a higher social sphere.

Therefore he hurriedly brushed the crumbs off the round hill of his vest, across which his heavy gold watch-chain meandered, saying "My dear old thing, I must unfortunately leave immediately. If you have anything more to tell me, 'phone. You know, 8182."

He pinched Anna's right cheek, as was his habit, and hastened to escape from the room.

Babette Bomberling

But a married man is rarely his own master.

"I must speak with you," Anna said quietly and firmly.

Anna commenced. But she did not tarry long upon the tortures she had endured through Bomberling's profession. She spoke of Babette. With an anxious tone she reminded her husband that the child would be seventeen this October, and before Bomberling had been able to declare himself ready to make any gift, she had told him earnestly that many girls of good family are engaged at this age. Here she gasped for breath and Bomberling interpolated that a girl must wait until the right man comes along.

With this he had again turned to go, for he did not know that the conversation was just beginning.

Without having taken note of his words, Anna spoke on and on, without stopping or faltering. She told Bomberling that parents must care for the happiness and future of their daughters. That in better

Babette Bomberling

circles this was considered one of the first duties of human nature.

Napoleon warbled gaily in his cage, and Anna interrupted herself, screaming, "Shut up, Napoleon!"

But the conjugal conversation became more violent. Occasionally Anna lost her breath, and Bomberling got a chance to answer back.

Until finally Anna burst out with the name and income of a noted attorney.

After a sudden silence, Bomberling quiet and abashed, asked "Does she love him?"

"Why, she does not know him yet," said Anna, now truly upset and out of patience with her husband's dullness.

She poured eau-de-cologne on her handkerchief and touched her forehead with it, breathing audibly.

This turn to the conversation was not foreign to Bomberling. He sighed with relief, relit his cigar, which had gone out during the heated conversation, and paced the carpet. Then a bell sounded.

For city people the door-bell is the voice of Fate. It evidently was coming to the

Babette Bomberling

rescue of Bomberling. Mrs. Bomberling twitched, picked up her belongings without hesitation and disappeared.

Bomberling was not a man to lose a moment. In the next instant he had gone through the other door.

In the corridor he found his nephew Paul, vainly trying to remove his hat, his arms full of flowers.

Bomberling pulled out his watch.

"Is it not past office time, my boy?" he asked.

Paul assented, but on the way to the factory he had seen these flowers in a shop. Only yesterday Babette had bemoaned that no more lilies-of-the-valley were to be found, so he had wanted to bring her these quickly.

"Well, do it, and then come after me," said Bomberling.

With that the door fell shut after him. He was not going to risk his freedom again.

* * * * *

While a taxi was carrying him swiftly and cleverly through the intricate mazes of streets and squares, where the fresh day's

Babette Bomberling

work was stirring and rushing forward, the old man pondered on the happy solution of all, if only Babette and Paul would unite.

The very year of Babette's birth, ten-year old Paul had come to him as the only heritage of the estate of an uncle, whom all the family had always looked upon as wealthy.

But testaments harbor more wondrous things than do other secrets. When the uncle died, he left his sorrowing relatives nothing but the boy. The others firmly declined this inheritance. Good August accepted. All smiled at this foolishness, for his business was small then, and he should have had enough to do caring for his own children.

But our pieces of foolishness are often the most brilliant strokes of our lives. Since some time now Paul had been his only confidential man in the management of the large mill, which was growing ceaselessly, and ever making further demands on their thought and ingenuity.

"For the best laid plans——" He had thought, that that which was not modern,

Babette Bomberling

could never become unmodern. That had been a mistake. Periods had been discovered. Now everything must be of a stated period. You must be very fastidious. Certain lines in the carving of the wood. Artistically hammered armature and trimmings of wrought iron. Cremation was becoming more modern and popular. One had to offer tastefully decorated urns.

When Paul showed a talent for drawing, Bomberling had sent him to an art school.

He was now his best designer and directed the carving studios of the factory. And that was excellent. For Bomberling, who could reckon figures like a Secretary of Finance, was as deficient in art as in music. He could not see why a curlicue should be prettier to the right than to the left. People did choose the most ridiculous ways of complicating their lives.

He frowned. He threw the cigar butt angrily out of the taxi window. In a metropolis there is a use for everything. A messenger boy had caught it up and put it in his mouth. Bomberling had to laugh. Wholesome folks do not let the unpleasant

Babette Bomberling

depress them. When the motor drew up to the curb, Bomberling was more comfortable, and when he found a series of samples of the loveliest ebony on his desk, he had recovered his usual good humor.

In the meantime Paul waited for Babette.

As he was a close relative of the family, the maid had led him into the dining-room, and not into the "region of culture." Here there was no one. Only Napoleon trilling his morning song. The loud duet of the domestic squabble had excited and aroused him to unusual efforts.

Paul looked earnestly at the little ball of yellow feathers that was puffing itself out at his approach, and thought: "You lucky, lucky bird! You see her every day."

No one came. Paul went to the sideboard to catch his reflection in the upright silver platter. He did not recollect what sort of necktie he had put on that morning. When he had left his rooms he had not dreamt that he would see Babette that day. But the silly platter belittled him ri-

Babette Bomberling

diculously, and his scarf was only an indistinguishable blur.

While Paul was trying to see himself in the window pane, he was disturbed. Babette had entered. Her blond hair curved smoothly over her small head and glistened in two big puffs over her ears. A black-velvet frock simply cut and open at the neck, enhanced her young beauty.

Babette had dressed with particular care this morning, she had great plans for the day.

Smiling she asked Paul what had brought him at such an unearthly hour; then she spied the flowers and rushed past him to the table.

"How lovely! I've been dreaming of lilies-of-the-valley all night."

Grasping a bunch of the white blossoms and bright green leaves she hurried towards her room.

At the door she reflected. Beaming on Paul, she said that he must really not think of waiting till her return, for she knew he must go to the mill. And then disappeared with a friendly nod.

Babette Bomberling

Paul went out slowly. He might have put his hat on much more quickly, because his arms were empty now.

* * * * *

When Babette returned, she poured herself a little coffee and bit into a brown bun, standing. Munching, she wandered back and forth, arranging her flowers.

She had never had the patience to sit down formally for a meal in the morning, and especially not today.

She decided to call on the famous actor, who as Romeo and Hamlet, as Don Carlos and Faust, hung over her dresser and all around her mirror. She wanted to ask him for his autograph. Did he care for blondes? She had heard that he was a Southerner. During her Italian lessons she had to think of him continually. *Io t'amo*—I love you.

Caught red-handed, she was startled. Herman had entered the room and slumped into his chair.

"Father among his coffins already?" he asked, and yawned.

Babette came back inquiring whether his

Babette Bomberling

early rising meant that he was possibly going to college?

"Nonsense. Hockey," grumbled Herman, yawning again, and rang for warm water.

Babette gathered the remaining flowers, nodded cordially to her brother and skipped out. She had to go to her lesson with Miss Grisham. Before leaving the apartment she looked for her mother.

Distrust is a housewife's virtue. Mrs. Bomberling sat in the kitchen and observed the cooking of the quince jam through her lorgnette.

Babette gave her a hearty kiss and thought tenderly: "How proud the dear soul would be if she were the mother-in-law of the most famous actor!"

The mother caressed the daughter's soft cheek, and thought, "My little lamb, the wife of the attorney-general."

Hope has its various aspects——

A picture of her Romeo between her books and music, Babette soon entered Miss Grisham's class room with a merry "Good morning" and a hurried glance of under-

Babette Bomberling

standing with her dearest chum Hilda Wagner. Well then, today at last!

Then lessons commenced. Even girls must be fitted out for their campaigns. Miss Grisham taught young ladies the language, history and art of Italy, that they might enjoy their honeymoon. The girls giggled a great deal. They laughed at the simplest phrases.

"Waiter, can this room be locked?" was to be translated, but only the squeaks of suppressed laughter could be heard.

Angrily Miss Grisham looked into the blue eyes and smooth faces and nervously turned to the next grammar lesson. With her shrill old-maid's treble, she now cried:

"You need not waken us in the morning."

This did not seem suitable either. The squeaks and giggles started again.

But even the longest hour has not more than sixty minutes. A bell signaled at last. The books slammed shut.

This was the only moment in the day that Miss Grisham smiled.

Arm in arm Babette and Hilda went through the streets. They were friends

Babette Bomberling

since they had met at Miss Grisham's. The fundamentals of all friendship united them. They were mutually envious and they pitied one another.

Babette admired Hilda because her father held a high government post, and her brother was an officer, and she was sorry for her twenty-two years and utter lack of beauty. Hilda pitied Babette because her father had that horrible and uncanny factory, and because she was not of good family. But she envied her blond hair, which made people turn on the street, and perhaps even more—her bright and cozy room.

Ever since Hilda could remember, the apartment of her parents had been shrinking. Only the reception rooms had continued.

Hilda slept on a folding couch in the dining-room, and her meager possessions, ribbons, veils, lace collars and postcards were secreted in a drawer in the bathroom, that served as her dressing-room. She hadn't a spot she could call her own.

For this reason she secretly longed to marry.

Babette Bomberling

Babette and Hilda were talking excitedly about the wonderful actor, to whose apartment they were now going. They stopped at every bill-board to read his name on the theater posters. Babette felt that his fame concerned her. In a few moments she would be in his presence.

Hilda was to wait outside. She offered to accompany her, but Babette would not accept this proof of friendship. With the dainty nod she always had when she had no further use for one, she disappeared into the house.

A servant, with a dirty fat baby on her arm, opened and led her into a room littered with books and pictures.

Here our Babette waited very nervously.

How would his voice sound when he bade welcome? Could he speak in any form but verse?

But even the gods are human at home.

In the adjoining room plates clattered, and someone said unpleasantly:

"Can't you teach that beast of a cook to fry onions brown?"

Babette winced. That was undoubtedly

Babette Bomberling

his voice. She still had it ringing in her memory: "Oh, my queen, how wondrous fair is life!"

Now a chair scraped in the adjoining room. Steps approached the middle door.

Without reflecting, Babette dashed out of the room. Quicker than a weasel she had disappeared from the strange flat.

To Hilda's many questions she only replied that one could not speak of such an adventure.

Hilda stared at her blond friend with fervent and warm admiration. They parted in solemn silence.

However, on reaching home Babette tore every last photograph of this man off her walls and threw them into a black box. She was furious that tears should roll down her cheeks the while.

What did a person who ate onions concern her?

Babette's mother had also made use of the time.

After the quince marmalade had been filled into the jars, and these counted over

Babette Bomberling

three times, Madam Anna disappeared in her bedroom for an hour.

Time changeth all things.

When she reappeared she had become a perceptibly slimmer, elegant lady, with a wealth of curls beneath her hat and veil. Like Spring, she was preceded and followed by the fragrance of flowers. With awe, the maid laid the fur cape about the wide shoulders, passed her the huge muff with its bouquet of artificial violets, and, politely opening the door, rang for the elevator.

Slowly Mrs. Bomberling was lowered to the ground.

She intended to visit her friend, the widow, a refined and charming lady. Her husband had been a great scientist. An entire family of bugs had been named after him. Besides by a happy coincidence, this lady was the aunt of the aforementioned noted attorney.

In spite of her honorable connection with the newly discovered race of bugs, the widow was in rather meager circumstances. She had to get on without a maid, and had only the coarsest housework done by the

Babette Bomberling

janitor's wife. The rest she did herself in kid gloves, a boudoir cap over her hair.

But even when handled with kid gloves, daily house work is coarse.

The janitor's wife did not show proper respect, and sneered when she was told to carry away the scant garbage. For this reason, the lady had asked her friend, Mrs. Bomberling, to bring her a few champagne corks, which she would occasionally toss into the waste-basket or garbage pail.

Mrs. Bomberling had gladly assented, although when the Bomberlings were alone, their meals consisted of no exaggerated luxuries.

But we must show ourselves worthy of the high opinion of our friends.

Mrs. Bomberling went to a wineshop, ordered several bottles of a light red wine and asked the clerk for some champagne corks.

"Of the best French brands, of course."

Her friend received her with great elation, for she was delighted to have someone to whom she could pour out her heart. The janitor's wife had smashed a small plaster

Babette Bomberling

bust of Schiller. Instead of asking pardon, the creature had declared that Schiller was not modern anyway.

"What do you say to that?" she asked trembling with rage.

Mrs. Bomberling blushed. This was beyond her sphere, but she fancied that the play "Don Carlos," which she had recently seen with Babette, had been made by this broken Schiller.

"There can be various opinions on that," she said hesitatingly.

"Most assuredly," her friend hastened to say, "But that such a person should dare to express a literary judgment to me. A slight difference of caste still exists."

Mrs. Bomberling handed over her package of corks, and called attention to their all being of the best brands. She might have more at any time. The other thanked her kindly and assured her that these would do for a long time. A cork every Sunday would be plenty. One must not be wasteful.

Now it was Anna's turn to talk. She reported how industriously her children were

Babette Bomberling

pursuing their courses, Babette in her Italian classes and Herman at college. Then she inquired politely whether the widow's nephew had arrived, for the clever state attorney was just being transferred to the metropolis.

The old lady nodded pleasantly. Yesterday the dear boy had called on her. She had promptly told him of her dear friend and her relations.

Mrs. Bomberling asked, cautiously, what the age of the good boy might be.

The auntie wrinkled her narrow forehead, and said after some reflection, that her poor old head was not good at dates. He had probably just entered on the forties. Perhaps he was already forty-five. Possibly even forty-eight. Everything is possible. But, however that might be, in comparison to his splendid advancement, he was still exceedingly young.

And so they talked over the various things that a mother and an aunt have to discuss. When Mrs. Bomberling was about to go she invited her dear friend to dinner the night of Babette's seventeenth birthday.

Babette Bomberling

In case the illustrious nephew would accompany her, he would be very welcome.

The good widow promised to extend the invitation. She believed that she might accept for him today.

They parted with the smiles of true friendship.

When Mrs. Bomberling stepped on the street the red autumn sun was reflected in the windows of the cheap attic flats. Hence it was setting. A few moments more and it would be the Bomberlings' dinner hour, but tardiness had always been Anna's special privilege. She decided to walk. A bit of exercise would do her good.

At the next corner she saw a truck from which they were selling ridiculously cheap cauliflower.

Anna stopped and approached the wagon about which women and girls were pushing and puffing. She was continually forgetting that five cents more or less did not matter at Bomberlings'. She successfully secured four large firm heads and finally even got five cents more off the low price. Thoroughly elated she went on.

Babette Bomberling

But possession is burdensome. At every step the package became heavier. The old newspaper wrapping burst and the chubby heads started flirting with every passer-by. Everyone seemed to smile at this impertinent vegetable that crowded against the costly furs. With every step Anna feared the big heads would roll away from her. She flushed with terror and embarrassment. At last her resistance was broken. She hailed a taxi.

In a few moments she was at home. Bomberling was already there. He was pacing back and forth in the dining-room, where the curtains were drawn and the light shone agreeably upon the set table.

"I'm terribly hungry," he called cheerfully when he heard Anna coming.

Soon they all sat about the table.

Bomberling did not delay with chatter, but began to eat hastily.

The cauliflower had thoroughly spoilt Anna's appetite.

Herman, who had just been at an extensive cocktail party, was separated from

Babette Bomberling

his family by a thick fog. Veils floated before his eyes.

"I have invited my dear friend to dinner on Babette's birthday. Her nephew, Mr. Kobertson, will probably accompany her. He is said to be a very charming man."

Babette frowned. She had ceased looking forward to her birthday.

As soon as dinner was over she went to her piano and played one funeral march after another in the pitch-dark room.

* * * * *

The days that preceded Babette's birthday consisted of a monotony of breakfasts, lunches and suppers.

But Babette had become more cheerful. The memory of Romeo's onions had faded a bit for Hilda's brother the lieutenant was home on leave and called for the two friends every afternoon after classes. „

Babette found that a uniform makes a street more picturesque.

Mrs. Bomberling was entirely and untiringly occupied these days.

Early and late she was buying and giving orders. She shirked no bother. The din-

Babette Bomberling

ner should be excellent and plentiful. Bomberling's guests should be satisfied.

One afternoon they found a card on returning home: Gustavius Kobertson, confidential attorney.

Success spurs us on. Anna now slept with the cook-book on her night table.

And finally the evening arrived.

The entire artistic region was brilliantly lit. From ceiling, walls and tables electric lights glowed. The etching with the ridiculously smiling pair was like a mirror; glistening, it reflected the many lights. The czars and grand dukes in the cupboard shone in their full regalia and decorations.

In the dining-room was the beautifully set table.

Babette had strewn it cleverly with fragrant violets. Since this morning this little flower was her favorite. She wore a bunch of them at the belt of her white dress. Mrs. Bomberling had asked from whom she had received so many violets. Babette seemed not to remember. Possibly they were from Hilda's brother the lieutenant, she had answered.

Babette Bomberling

About her neck Babette wore the finely wrought necklace that her father had given her that morning.

Bomberling had bought it himself.

He had stopped his motor at an elegant jeweler's and asked the smart man in dress clothes behind the counter to show him "something for the very pretty neck of a young lady."

He had been advised politely to take this very fine necklace. From it was suspended a single pearl, like a dew drop.

In his office Bomberling had unwrapped it again. At his desk, where black and brown moldings were piled high, and, where the sketches for coffins and grave-stones left little room, the old man sat and slid the delicate chain over his round fingers. When he had bedded it again in the fine leather case, a thoughtful and satisfied smile was on his face.

Babette was happy with her pearl.

When her father came home she rushed to embrace him and said, "I must continually think that it lay hidden in a shell at the

Babette Bomberling

bottom of the sea." And then she dashed to the piano and played a wild dance.

Bomberling stood dazed and proud before the glittering table. He admired Anna intensely. Where had she learnt to do all this?

He did not know that in every woman there is a bit of a princess. At sixteen Anna had seen this table already. In the sparks that flew from the anvil.

But where was Anna? In vain Bomberling had sought her in the artistic region. Finally he found her in the laundry where the crayons of both their parents stared down upon rows of wine-bottles and decorated platters.

Here stood Mrs. Bomberling with Mr. Schutte. Mr. Schutte was the hired butler. The widow had recommended him to her friend. He was a jewel. Where he served nothing was left to be desired. He was wholly efficient.

He had arrived that minute. He was asking for any special wishes Madam might have. Anna spoke excitedly at his immobile, masklike face, that was so smooth

Babette Bomberling

and only twitched painfully when Madam pronounced the French name of a dish.

Anna was rather relieved when Mr. Schutte interrupted with a polite wave of his hand that he was sufficiently instructed. He bowed and went to get his white gloves out of his overcoat, which he had hung modestly behind the pantry door. He had to hunt a while and glanced back nervously at Anna, who was still there without any apparent reason. The pockets of this coat were deep. The lining of the coat was worthy its name in every sense of the word. Sewed to the coat only along the outer edge, it had held many a partridge, pasty and bottle of wine, besides the usual profusion of choice fruits, cigars iced cakes and bonbons. For Mr. Schutte had a family at home. Everyone must care for his own. husband in the doorway. She had wanted

Anna received a shock when she spied her to 'phone him that afternoon that the attorney might be forty-eight years old. Distance extenuates. From day to day she had postponed saying this into August's face.

Now there was no time for private alter-

Babette Bomberling

cation. The bell might ring at any moment. Bomberling must change quickly. Since some time Anna was stately and pompous.

Mr. Schutte had put on his gloves and said in the refined whisper that was peculiar to him:

“Pardon, Madam, one must not wait till it rings. I shall go to the entry, and open when it rings. I invite the guests to step into the drawing-room.”

Mrs. Bomberling asked if she might take a last look into the kitchen. Mr. Schutte consented, with a pitying shrug of his shoulder.

When Anna came hurrying back along the hall Mr. Schutte asked if she had any objection to his whispering the brand of each wine as he poured it into the guests' glass. That this was customary.

“Must that be?” asked Anna alarmed, and stared into the expressionless visage before her.

Schutte nodded.

Anna hesitated. Then she said doubtfully that she believed only the champagne was of any well-known brand.

Babette Bomberling

Mr. Schutte reassured her. That would not matter in the least. That he was accustomed to mumbling only the most first-class names.

With that he bowed low and opened the door of the drawing-room.

A good lackey is a great saving.

Her mind at ease, Mrs. Bomberling rustled in.

Bomberling waited.

At first it appeared as though all had forgotten their invitations, but then they came in quick succession.

First of all, Hilda Wagner with her brother, Fred, in uniform. Then Paul with exquisite flowers. Behind him, Bomberling's chief clerk straight from the barber's. At his side his young wife, who was in mourning. She excused herself, saying that her grandmother had died, and really she should not attend parties, but that this little dinner surely could not be considered a pleasure.

In the meanwhile a classmate of Herman's had come and made a splendid bow before each one. And finally the widow

Babette Bomberling

with her nephew, the illustrious Gustavus Kobertson.

Dinner could have been served immediately, if it had not been necessary to wait for Uncle Albert and Aunt Helen.

Babette sat on the arm of a chair and watched the new acquaintance, who had taken a seat next to her father and was conversing with him.

He was tall and lean. His nails were as glossy as his patent-leather shoes. His forehead reached to the nape of his neck.

Babette sniffed the air. Then she quickly slipped from her chair. She wanted to tell Hilda Wagner that this man perfumed himself.

Herman and his friend had exchanged a look of appreciation of the attorney's monocle, which sat firmly, as if rooted, under the eyebrow. The fellow was undoubtedly a cavalier. In the meantime the object of their admiration, lounging in his big chair, was occupied in making it quite clear to this coffin manufacturer that he had made a remarkably quick career. With such fabulous

Babette Bomberling

rapidity few would ever be able to follow him.

That assertion was not incorrect. Such an accident could hardly come again, and it was that alone which had allowed Mr. Kobertson to advance so rapidly. One afternoon when Mr. Kobertson was as usual boring himself horribly, he had thoughtlessly drawn a huge question-mark on the vacant half of the document that he was supposed to work on. A beautiful question-mark with a big hump like a creditor and a slender waist like a pretty girl, and beneath it a dot, full and round as the globe. At that moment the door was pulled open and his chief came in. Kobertson tried in vain to hide the result of his undesired drawing talent.

“You have found something doubtful? Hand it to me.”

What Fate has in store for us is sure to take place. The document was examined. Mr. Kobertson had discovered a big fraud and rendered a great service to his government.

Babette Bomberling

Most things really require a great deal less brain than we imagine.

But this was a purely personal matter of the attorney's. It is comprehensible that he did not allude to these details.

Besides, he was interrupted by the appearance of the last guests. Uncle Albert and Aunt Helen had arrived.

Mrs. Bomberling would have been heartily glad not to invite them. They did not belong among these guests, but Albert was August's brother, and if she had asked Helen to postpone her birthday visit, she would have come to spite her. Aunt Helen was one of those who cannot see why one should try to please people.

Two little creases curved from her mouth. These simulated a continual smile on her face. That was an illusion, she never smiled.

As she entered the drawing-room now, she remarked that she would not have been late if she could afford a taxi like certain other people. Then she greeted the other guests with a sharp look. At short intervals Albert was making bows a step behind her.

Babette Bomberling

His long black coat hung from his bony shoulders as from a wooden coat-hanger. A long beard, gray and well-groomed lent him a dignified appearance. He was a life-insurance agent, and so the occupations of the two brothers were related.

Schutte rolled the doors back. They went to dinner.

When Mrs. Bomberling saw that the *pâté* lay perfectly in the center of the platter, she sighed with relief.

Her neighbor was telling of the delightful variations of the modern motor siren. A friend of his had a horn that coughed like a dog—a charming thing.

“How very interesting,” murmured Mrs. Bomberling, the while praying to God that He keep the trout from becoming too soggy.

Soon all were conversing animatedly. As in all the noisy confusions of life, each understood the other better than himself.

One could hear Mrs. Bomberling saying that only the man with his own home was in possession of his full self-respect.

And Aunt Helen scolding about the peas, for rolling off the knife so easily.

Babette Bomberling

And Paul calling to the lieutenant that young girls did not know their own minds.

To all this the clinking of glasses and rattling of plates.

Mr. Schutte served the attorney with especial deference. He had experience. The oldest one was always intended for the bridegroom. The young plantlets were only there as a decorative filling. Suddenly Aunt Helen shrieked shrilly:

"This is too much. Every time the fellow fills my glass he mumbles some impertinence."

Schutte continued quietly, whispering "Pissporter" into the ear of the next, and poured wine.

The young men grinned. The widow stared silently at her plate, only her long, gray eyelashes fluttered. Mr. Kobertson trained his monocle on Aunt Helen and observed her until her mistake had been explained from all sides.

"There seems to be something new every day," she said testily, while her face wore its staid smile.

Anna had two red roses on her cheeks.

Babette Bomberling

She had Aunt Helen and Uncle Albert served a second time. Chewing is a hindrance to speech.

However, wine makes the tongue wag, and Mr. Schutte refilled Aunt Helen's glass to the brim whenever she had sipped at it. We avenge with the means at our disposal.

And so Aunt Helen began to chatter. She told the illustrious guest and everyone who cared to listen, that she did not need to be ashamed of her origin either. In her little home town her mother had been the first to own a set of real artificial teeth. Today they were still talking about it. She had never adjusted it inside the house, but, when she left the door she would call the servant to fetch her mouthpiece and in plain sight of all, would hook it in. For at that time people were no different than today. What they do not see they don't believe.

* * * * *

Anna rose from the table. The sweets might as well be passed in the other rooms.

Someone went to the piano and played.

Babette Bomberling

The music was pleasant after the good meal. The men smoked. The attorney stood beneath the etching and whispered pretty compliments in Babette's ear. She listened smiling, the while her eyes met the glances of the lieutenant, who was watching from the further room.

The widow whispered to her friend that everything had gone marvelously.

Paul approached Babette and asked if she remembered him.

She tucked her arm under his and drew him aside. She asked him whether he did not think Hilda's brother was awfully smart and dashing. He said that there was a frivolous expression about the lieutenant's mouth. Babette laughed and said that she could only see a blond moustache there and that Paul showed no judgment of men at all.

Schutte passed the coffee and cordials.

Aunt Helen wiped her mouth and suggested breaking up for the trip home. She did not care to miss the last trolley. Anna did not blame her; her own resources were at an end.

Babette Bomberling

Many bows and handshakes.

Voices died away.

Mr. Schutte asked if he might go, and disappeared down the back stairs for home and family.

The Bomberlings remained in the empty rooms that seemed large and barren, as though the noisy guests had widened them.

The lights extinguished, good-night was bidden.

In the bedroom Bomberling said:

"You did your part sublimely, dear, only the bridgroom was rather old vintage."

He laughed, for he was glad that the whole affair was over. This old boy should never have his daughter, as sure as her name was Babette Bomberling.

Anna had not answered.

The exhausted mother had fallen asleep.

* * * * *

One can have too much of a good thing.

Bomberling's fireside comfort was gone.

Whenever Mrs. Bomberling was resting, stretching in her easy chair, freed of all formal restrictions, her lorgnette resting on the toilette-table and the comfortable spec-

Babette Bomberling

tacles on her nose, facilitating the perusal of the illustrated weekly—it rang, and Mr. Koberston came to call.

Whenever Bomberling felt thoroughly at home, smoking in his chair or pacing the room, hands in his pockets, glad of Anna, of the appetizing picture on the wall, of hopping Napoleon for whom he kindly picked up the bit of sugar he threw out of his cage—it rang, and Mr. Koberston came to call.

For the visitor these calls had become a pleasant habit. He enjoyed sitting in the brightly lit rooms, smoking one good cigarette after another, and taking pleasure in Babette's seventeen years. The fact that his aunt had assured him that this pretty girl would not turn him down, sent him into an ecstasy that was not unpleasant.

The sooner wooed the better.

He was earnestly considering giving his approaching fiftieth birthday the proper consecration with marriage.

In the meanwhile Anna, full of humility and devotion, screwed herself once more

Babette Bomberling

into her tight, tailored frock before her bedroom mirror.

In the kitchen they were preparing little delicious bites. All the lights in the "region of culture" were turned on, and a cloth was hung over little Napoleon's cage.

Babette was visibly pleased with the visits of the attorney. They brought an interruption into deadly dull family peace which was harder for her to bear than ever before. She felt as we all do in early Spring, when we can't bear to be in our quiet rooms, and yet find no respite, in the noisy streets, because we see stones instead of grass and flowers.

She sat at the piano and played. When she stopped, she would smile at Mr. Koberton and ask him at what age a lieutenant became a captain, or whether one must do anything besides growing old to become a general and commander-in-chief.

We are flattered to be asked something we know. The attorney was glad to answer and give explicit information. At last a girl who was hungry for knowledge and did not babble of dances and theaters.

Babette Bomberling

Beaming on the chatting pair, slightly out of breath, Anna entered the pleasant music room.

She excused her tardy appearance with a lot of fuss. Mr. Koberston tried to interrupt her as soon as possible; he blew a kiss way over her round hand that held the lorgnette, and insisted that she should not have let his appearance disturb her in the least. Even politenesses may occasionally be truthful.

Bomberling invariably had the misfortune to enter the room just as the dear caller was making his adieus and driving to his club.

Winter had come, real winter, with sleet and snowflakes and ice. This is justified for winter sports in the mountains to a certain extent, but here in the great city it is only an abominable hindrance to traffic.

On this Mrs. Bomberling and Mr. Koberston were agreed as they now sat alone together, for Babette was skating with Hilda Wagner.

The quiet rooms were warm and bright. The water was bubbling in the tea-kettle and the wind howled outdoors.

"It makes me shiver to hear it," said the

Babette Bomberling

attorney. "Isn't it reckless of your daughter——"

A loud ring, as though all youth were sounding an alarm. Skates clinked and Babette's head popped around the door, with snow on her fur cap.

"What heavenly weather we are having!" she called and slammed the door.

Only a whiff of fresh air remained behind. The attorney stroked his smooth, bald head, unpleasantly affected.

Babette had merely wished to reassure herself that the usual visitor was in his customary chair. Anything as long as she wouldn't have to eat alone with the family today. And she cordially asked Mr. Koberston to stay to supper.

For in the midst of the street's turmoil, when they were yelling the evening paper, all the lights had flamed up, and it had seemed to become lighter instead of darker, while Hilda was buying a postage stamp, and while she and Lieutenant Wagner had sworn eternal faith. Now she was betrothed.

Babette came out of her dreams with a

Babette Bomberling

shock. It seemed as though someone had screamed "ENGAGED."

They were at the table eating salmon with brown butter, and watching for the bones. Mr. Koberston was quietly remarking that fish was good and easily digestible food. Then Anna reported that the handle had broken off one of the Russian cups. It is a misfortune when such an accident strikes even the wealthy.

Bomberling ate silently. He looked weary. At this time of the year, orders heaped up till they could scarce be carried out. He broke away from his thoughts only once to remark that there seemed to be a lot of influenza.

"One must not think of that," said the attorney slightly jarred.

Herman was not there. He was at a friend's, who was supposed to help him with his books. But this friend's name was Liane Violetta, the star of a vaudeville, at which he and Mr. Koberston were regular guests.

Anna was tired today too. Her gout bothered her in such weather and this new dress was particularly tight, but she

Babette Bomberling

straightened up and smiled. Her pretty daughter should have happiness and social prestige.

Babette played soft Spring songs. Mr. Koberston followed her into the music room.

Then Babette stopped and said that her hand hurt. The attorney wanted to see the poor little hand. He took it and suddenly slipped his first finger up inside her silk sleeve.

Babette shrieked and tore herself away. Anna came in and asked what had happened.

Babette rubbed her wrist under the sleeve and said a nasty animal had bitten her.

Anna blushed. She reminded Babette that in a clean home, such as that of her parents, there were no nasty animals.

But Babette continued rubbing her arm and left the room.

Mr. Koberston smiled and told Mrs. Bomberling not to be embarrassed; such a thing might happen in the best of families. But he left soon after that.

* * * * *

Babette Bomberling

The following morning an icy blast swept through the Bomberlings' apartment.

All the windows were open, the vacuum-cleaner was sucking and the beaters beating. The suspicious oriental rug on the hall floor was getting special attention. Anna could not endure insects. The cold that streamed in was a painful torture, but we must do our duty where we see it.

Yesterday's occurrence should not be repeated. Anna wanted to be able to tell her noted guest that he might take his tea in her rooms without fear of disturbance. There were no crawly creatures at the Bomberlings'. She wanted to call his attention to the fact that a man is sheltered best in his own home.

But few plans are realized. Most of them are there just to keep us breathless.

The attorney did not come that afternoon, and even on the following day he remained away from the Bomberlings' apartment. Anna waited in vain for his call the entire day, not daring to make herself comfortable even for a moment.

The third morning brought a letter, that

Babette Bomberling

sent a balmy fragrance of heliotrope over the salami on the breakfast table.

When Anna had cut the envelope it seemed to her as though the hand-made paper was entirely covered with insects' legs. Hastily she took up her spectacles. Then she guessed from whom this letter might be and with a shock laid these aside and grasped her diamond-studded lorgnette.

How easily we may become guilty of an impropriety.

The letter was actually from Mr. Koberston. The long thin script informed her that a sudden longing for clean mountain air was taking him to St. Moritz. It expressed his gratitude and the hope that the future would bring another meeting.

Anna paled. "Clean mountain air" hit her as a bitter reproach. Couldn't she have had the carpets beaten a day sooner? One tiny creature had annihilated her entire plan. Or had it been the coffins again? She brooded and worried.

Herman was upset too, when he had read the letter. He had just founded a Fletcherizing club. Every member was obliged to

Babette Bomberling

chew every bite that he took in this chewing club—seventy-four times.

Herman had intended to make the illustrious friend of the family an honorary member, in order to put the club on a higher plane. "This doesn't suit me a bit," said Herman sniffing at the letter.

"Nor me," said Anna, looking lovingly at her big boy. They agreed so rarely nowadays.

Now Babette entered. A sad, earnest mother-look went from the letter to the tall, slim girl.

Babette brought two bundles of pine boughs, which she had just bought of a woman on the back stairs.

She pressed a hearty kiss on her mother's cheek, and said that the old woman had told her the snow was three feet deep in the country.

"That made me think of Grandpa's blacksmith shop," said she. "When I was little you used to tell me how you all sat around the warm, red fire while the snow drifted high outside."

Babette Bomberling

Anna cleared her throat several times. The maid might come in at any moment, was perhaps at the door already.

She was angry with Babette and more so with herself. When had she told the child all this nonsense. It must have been in those first years when the hammering of the great city had always reminded her of the anvil at home. Children have an unmerciful memory.

"How lovely that must have been," said Babette dreamily, "the red fire and outdoors the cold, white snow."

A suspicion crept up in Anna.

"Babette, you didn't by any chance happen to tell Mr. Koberston of the smithy?" she questioned.

Babette shook her head thoughtfully and said she could remember nothing of the sort.

Her mother passed her the letter. Anxiously Mrs. Bomberling watched the smooth and rosy baby face. It changed to a mischievous grin.

Babette Bomberling

"I should like to see the good man on skis, tearing down a hill," said she giggling with delight.

That was all. With that the affair was ended for her. She was cutting and tying the pine branches and declaring she would soon change the apartment into a winter wood. Anna was glad and yet distressed. She had surely not wanted her child to suffer; but hadn't it appeared as though Babette had been greatly pleased with these calls?

What a difficult time a mother has understanding her children!

She brooded and grieved. But our everyday life claims its rights.

The big bill of the delicatessen dealer was no dream.

When she asked Bomberling for a small extra for that month's housekeeping, and regretted that it had been spent all in vain, he burst out laughing and gave her double the amount. He only advised her to leave all matrimonial plans alone. Then he pinched her right cheek, as was his habit, and left smiling.

Babette Bomberling

He could not let himself in for further discussions. The factory was waiting.

Anna sighed. She enjoyed talking a thing over. Why if not for that, had she married after all?

Wistfully she put the money in her silver mesh-bag. It was a shame that Bomberling gave his family so little thought.

The pine boughs spread peace in the family. All who came from the cold outside into the warm room, remarked that Christmas was approaching, and were pleased.

All except Babette. It always seemed to her as though a window were open somewhere, or a stranger were sitting at their table, making fun of her parents' conversation.

A secret is a heavy burden, and Babette was not accustomed to carrying burdens.

She had had to make one promise after another. Not a soul was to know of her happiness. Fred would tell her the reasons for this later on.

His leave was over and he had gone. Every day she called at the post-office for

Babette Bomberling

her letter. Her little purse was filled with stamps. For every time she wanted to ask for a letter, everyone seemed to grin stupidly, and then she would quickly buy a stamp and flee. But now the clerk at the window knew her, and the big envelope passed into her hand between two silent smiles.

It invariably contained a huge white sheet, over which a few lines of hasty words ran, like horses galloping out of the barracks. These words always said the same, that Fred loves his little darling and is thinking of her day and night. And at the end they poured out a lot of kisses.

There is no joy that does not also sadden.

These letters, which Babette carried dutifully over her heart, did not please her a bit.

She would sit in the winter twilight, in her cheery room, close by the snow-banked window, and dream of someone who would write little letters, which would not blurt everything out roughly, and yet would be brimful of tenderness—and wouldn't smell of tobacco, either.

Babette Bomberling

When it had become dark she would spring up. Reminding herself that she had no business thinking of strangers any more; that she must concentrate on Fred. She tried to recall him. The black, glossy hair accurately parted, the small eyes, brown and flashing. The white teeth under the thick moustache, and the beautiful blue and red uniform.

And now she would light the lamps and write a short, adoring letter, wherein she would forget that it was not directed to an unknown.

Fred found these epistles when he came back from duty, dead tired. He flew through them, yawned and stuck them, all crumpled, into his breeches pockets. Then he threw himself on the couch and thought of—"Mucky."

"Mucky" tried on winter coats all day. She turned and twisted her supple cat's-body before respectable small-town women, who could never understand why the coats look so different today than yesterday at the shop.

Babette Bomberling

And when "Mucky" had turned a thousand times upon her patent leather slippers, until even the old earth had turned on its axle, "Mucky" would sup with Freddy in a wing of the Eagle House.

While she poked delicious morsels into her mouth, she related how the husbands, who accompanied their ladies, would often look as though they would rather choose her than the coat. And when she had drunk a little, she became sad and said that in the metropolis she would surely have had her own flat by this time, a prize pekinese and a live parrot. And then she would laugh again, pull her Freddy's moustache, and tell him that he was not at all what she had once dreamt, and that she like the uniform of the red hussars much better than his.

Fred assured her that no one is perfect and that she might well be satisfied with his uniform. And then he ordered another bottle of champagne and caviar set in a block of ice.

This did not only bring him nearer to "Mucky," but also to his fiancée. For all debts must be paid eventually. The income

Babette Bomberling

of the coffin factory would have no musty odor for him.

For this reason it was a part of Freddy's daily program to dash off a page of hasty love words before supper and address the envelope to Babette.

While writing these, his thoughts would already be with "Mucky." But as he licked the envelope he said to himself that wives must have less temperament than she, and he reduced the ten thousand kisses to one thousand.

We must take life as it comes to us.

But what seems little to one, is a great deal for another.

These letters were more of a burden to Babette from day to day.

They oppressed her. They almost choked her ringing laughter when Herman's friend, who now skated with her daily, told her his jolly yarns and jokes.

She came to resent Hilda. Had she really needed a postage stamp that time?

Only when the band played a sentimental waltz and she flew through the clear winter air with Herman's friend, would she

Babette Bomberling

be reconciled, and think it heavenly to be secretly engaged. Then she would wish that the present moment might last forever.

But unfortunately bliss is not lasting.

One day Fred wrote that he was returning.

The sable scarf that "Mucky" wished for Christmas, forced him to this. However the reasons of our deeds lie hidden.

Babette was startled. She reread the letter. The script galloped so fast over the sheet, as though Fred were on the way already.

Her restlessness drove her to Hilda, where she might possibly hear more without giving herself away.

This was the first time Babette had been to the Wagners' since she had secretly become related to them. As she ran up the wide stairs, she noticed that they were marble outside, and inside wood. With a shock it dawned on her that Hilda's cranky papa was now her papa, and Hilda's thin, nervous mamma was now her mamma. She sighed. A great wave of tenderness for her own father and mother filled her.

Babette Bomberling

Hilda was the only one at home. She was in her room, her bathroom, packing a suitcase. She was to go to her aunt, whom she helped with the house-cleaning every year.

She was actually only an aunt of her father's. Hilda told how she had been afraid of her as a child. She had thought the bony fingers of her long, lean hands were witch's pincers. But this aunt had a veritable treasure collection of old china, silver and fine linen; for this reason Hilda's father insisted that she go regularly to see her.

"It is a bore to be there," said Hilda. "But till I get there the trip is lovely through the snowed-under country."

She looked dreamily at the dim window-pane, that gave the tiny bathroom scant light, and much privacy.

Babette's restless eyes had discovered a photograph of a young man, 'midst the confusion of dance favors, Japanese paper fans and the shower-bath.

Hilda laughingly declared that it was the newest picture of Fred in mufti.

Babette Bomberling

Babette took it in her hand and gazed upon the strange man with astonishment. She said that she would scarce recognize Hilda's brother without his uniform, but that he was probably not coming back for some time?

Hilda was trying to close her grip. The question was lost in the rattle, and exertion.

So Babette had to go again without having discovered anything.

* * * * *

Formerly, when Babette had had any surprises for her parents, her cousin Paul had always been her confidant. She could keep no secrets from him. He had even been informed that great actors eat onions, and are consequently not worth any extraordinary esteem.

Possibly she might catch some advice from him now, by artifice? Possibly she might talk with him without giving herself away?

When Bomberling sent a 'phone message, saying he would not be able to get home till just before dinner tonight, she decided to call for her father at his office. There she

Babette Bomberling

could surely manage a short talk with Paul.

But first she must go skating. Sunny weather with a sharp frost in the air.

Herman's friend was waiting for her. He had not only a remarkable memory for jokes and riddles, but was continually worrying about improving the economic condition of the universe. He was disgusted with the state, the church, marriage, commerce and whatever else there is. He was studying national economy, and intended to throw over all the decayed institutions of the world in a few years.

But even this did not fully content him. He desired the sympathy of Babette's warm little heart.

Babette listened to him, slightly inattentive, for she was thinking of Freddy, and more of her coming talk with Paul.

Finally, when the thorough economist began on the army, he caught her entire attention.

He reckoned for Babette, with statistics, how many children one had to raise for every cannon. He was for complete demobilization.

Babette Bomberling

"Away with them," said he.

He was so wonderfully manly. Babette got the impression that all soldiers had already been shoved off this round, smooth globe—Fred too. If this was necessary for world betterment, Babette would resign herself to it.

A long whistle shrilled from some factory smoke-stack. Babette loosened her skates and said good-bye.

Herman's friend held her hand firmly and said that he had been wanting to ask her all afternoon if she felt herself sufficiently sublime to enter a free-love marriage. She was actually morally obliged, for there was someone who scorned everything else, and could only love her.

Babette tried to free her hand, but she did not succeed.

"You have the moral obligation, Babette," the national economist reiterated. "The M. O., pray do not forget that. I shall leave you time to think it over."

He squeezed Babette's hand, which was stiff with the cold, until it hurt. Then he

Babette Bomberling

freed it with a fling, to express his earnestness.

Babette ran up the narrow boardwalk that connected the smooth ice with the firm earth.

A fine fog in the streets made the lights dance as in a fantasy. Motors and people were mysteriously veiled. The noise of the fading day dampened down to a buzzing rumble.

Babs sat in an auto. All about her purred and buzzed "M. O.," "M. O."

She began to realize that it was the moral obligations that make life so complicated.

Many dancing balls of light indicated Bomberling's factory in the haze. Babette stepped into the show rooms, which took up the front of the long stretch of buildings.

The sharp odor of all the wood, recalled forests and soil.

Her father was not there, but two gentlemen stood near the door, in front of a magnificent coffin. Their heads crowned with high silk hats were tilted reflectively.

"A lot of money for such a thing," whispered the one. "But considering that

Babette Bomberling

he allowed himself so little during his lifetime——”

The other nodded.

“Let us take the larger one,” he sighed.

They turned to look for the salesman, who was whispering with a slender lady. In consideration of the sadness of the case, she wanted a slight reduction in the price, but he assured her that all prices were already reckoned for sad circumstances. Only in the sale of a half-dozen could they allow a slight reduction.

Now he recognized Babette. With a respectful bow, he said that her father was in his office. Then he hurried over to the waiting gentlemen.

Bomberling was not alone. Babette stopped in the little waiting room. She heard voices beyond the curtain, distinctly.

It was a dull conversation. An old gentleman was inquiring about the expenses of a first-class funeral, in order that he might make proper allowances in his will.

Her father was advising cremation, and reckoned for him how much more quickly everything is over then.

Babette Bomberling

The visitor declared he was too old for new fashions, that he was not in a hurry anyway. He giggled, and Bomberling's loud laugh rang out.

Then only the mumbling of figures was to be heard. The old man wanted everything explained, to the minutest detail. He had nothing else to do. This little diversion was pleasant to him.

Babette got impatient. She wondered where Paul might be? She sneaked out on tiptoe.

When she entered the big showroom diffidently, a door opened at the opposite side and Paul appeared.

Babette hurried towards him through the narrow passage left by the many rows of coffins.

"Whew!" said she, "all these awful things. Do you know that people die when they are young, too? But when they are old, then they have to. I don't want to grow old."

She clung to Paul's arm nervously.

"Come out of here," she whispered.

Babette Bomberling

At the moment Paul could think of no nicer spot in the world. He said it was only the twilight that made the place a bit gruesome, and switched on all the electric lights. The black ebony reflected Babette from all sides. Paul asked whether Babette had anything special to tell him.

She said she had only come to call for her father, whom she had not seen all day.

Then she was silent.

It is not easy to find the right words, when one wants to avoid a particular topic.

But finally they got a-chattering anyway.

They sat on opposite corners of the splendrous tomb of state, smiling at each other.

Paul asked if Babette had a skating companion.

Babette said that occasionally a friend of Herman's skated beside her. And then she asked whether one was morally obliged to love someone in whom one infused love involuntarily?

Paul stared at her. This was not an easy question to answer. He asked whether she were thinking of any particular person,

Babette Bomberling

stooping the while to examine some carving closely.

Babette said that she was only asking out of general interest in the subject. Paul looked up again, and said that one could only decide such obligations from case to case.

And then he asked if she was still seeing Hilda's brother frequently.

Babette turned up her nose at this and said he had left long ago. But what did Paul think of engagements? Did he think it very despicable to call them off after a short time, if one could not stand the other?

Paul laughed and said that in such cases it might be better not to have become engaged in the first place.

But Babette lost her temper there.

"You always talk so wisely and with such a superior air," she cried, "as though you could never make a mistake."

Suddenly two tears rolled down her cheeks. Paul was alarmed.

"Is it the old attorney?" he asked cautiously.

Babette had to laugh at that again.

Babette Bomberling

"You are too stupid," she said, and slid down from the high tomb.

"I was only speaking in general."

Paul gave her a probing look.

Then he said, slowly picking his words—that he too, speaking purely theoretically of course, always considered it more practical if a woman never took a decisive step, without consulting her best male friend. And that engagements, where one could not stand the other, should be broken without consideration.

That was Paul's honest opinion. But candidness and cunning are often hard to separate, and Paul could not go more into detail, for Bomberling disturbed the conversation here.

After he had escorted his caller to the door and invited the two gentlemen to honor him again, he had learned from the head salesman that Miss Bomberling had come. Then he had gone in search of his Babette.

He tucked her arm under his, and asked if she had really only come to fetch her old

Babette Bomberling

father, or whether she was having some secrets with Paul again.

Paul and Babette laughed delightedly at this.

They went into the office.

While her father signed some letters, Babette admired a typewriter that had just arrived, all new and shining. She played with it and declared, if the ice were not so good it would be fun to sit here and earn money.

Paul offered to teach her, and her father cried he would engage her the minute she had learnt it.

Babette was enraptured with this new idea. She would come as soon as thaw set in. Absolutely. For reassurance she struck her red-silk blouse, but there the fifteen letters of Lieutenant Wagner crackled, with their sum total of fifteen thousand kisses. Babette shrank together and became silent.

Paul said that she was too reckless with her promises. That he could see she was already regretting everything.

Babette Bomberling

Bomberling slammed down the cover of his ink-well, and declared that every day has its own problem. They should talk about it when the ice had melted.

A bit later, father and daughter had ridden off.

Paul returned to the showrooms. The fragrance of flowers was about the high tomb. It was really a pretty spot. He sat on the side where Babette had swung, and pulled the evening paper out of his pocket.

Reading the newspaper has a soothing effect. One comes in contact with all the chances in the world. It seems so simple to snatch up one of these strings of fortune.

When Bomberling and Babette came home, Anna had not yet arrived.

Herman, sitting in his room, called from out a cloud of pipesmoke, that mother was being charitable today.

That was true. Mrs. Bomberling's friend, the Professor's widow, had started a small club. She had contributed her late husband's title, and Mrs. Bomberling the wool. Together with a few refined ladies they sat

Babette Bomberling

and crocheted warm garments for poor children.

Mrs. Bomberling went to these gatherings extravagantly dressed, and avoided everything cheap, even in her conversation. She told of the expensive Persian in her hall, mentioned the oil-painting by a renowned artist, the college course of her son and the Russian cups.

But what the tongue may hide, will be given away by the hands, which no one can change.

It had not escaped the ladies, that wealthy Mrs. Bomberling could make up these coarse wool things with remarkable dexterity. One faultless piece after another flew from her hands.

They had come to an understanding with a few glances over the head of the busily occupied lady.

She could not have had a refined upbringing.

Today Mrs. Bomberling had tried to be the first in this circle of neighborly love. She wanted a few undisturbed words with her dearest friend. The widow would surely

Babette Bomberling

know why, and how long her nephew would be winter sporting.

When she entered the room, however, another lady was there already. And they were so deeply engrossed in their talking that they did not hear her coming. Anna was in the middle of the room, before her friend sprang up and hurried towards her. She looked frightened and asked if Anna had been listening long. She had just been singing her praises.

Then she introduced the ladies: Baroness Pryczsbitzky-Ratzoska.

Mrs. Bomberling bowed and said that she had just come from a famous antiquarian. She had bought the seal of an Egyptian mummy for her husband for a Christmas gift.

The baroness inquired whether this had been the expressed wish of Mrs. Bomberling.

Anna said that this was not the case. But that it was extremely difficult to find a suitable present for a man, and added that antiques were the newest mode today.

Baroness Pryczsbitzky-Ratzoska agreed with her in everything. She was exceed-

Babette Bomberling

ingly pleasant and agreeable. While her fingers were making the needles fly, Mrs. Bomberling worried, "Could the lady have understood von Bomberling in the introduction?"

Her suspicion was strengthened when the baroness asked if she might call upon her the following morning at eleven.

Mrs. Bomberling flushed with pleasure. She asked whether she would rather come to tea or supper.

But the lady begged to be allowed to come for a little chat at eleven.

When all the members were assembled, and one could no longer hear on the right what was being said on the left, Anna asked about the attorney and his trip.

The widow answered rather ill-humoredly, that she did not know anything either. That her nephew wasn't a child and could do as he pleased.

No one could deny that. And with that the conversation was ended.

Anna should have enjoyed bringing good news home. Babette's restlessness had not escaped her. It was evident to her that the

Babette Bomberling

child missed this unpleasant old fellow, love is so incomprehensible.

* * * * *

Hence Anna was doubly happy to find Babette in gay spirits on her return. She sat straight again, and seemed freer and happier.

There was no mistake about this. A load had been taken off Babette's heart. Lieutenant Wagner's letters were gone. Babette had followed Paul's advice. She had broken the engagement. At least, she had tied the letters together and placed them in an envelope. On this she had written:

"Je ne vous aime pas, je ne vous avais pas aimé, je ne vous animerai pas."

She had the impression that the situation demanded French. The words said much, said all, and had been found so easily in her grammar.

Babette had intended to send off the package of letters early the following morning. The new envelope that would come, should also be enclosed, unopened.

But none of us know what the morrow will bring. When the morning's letter lay

Babette Bomberling

in Babette's hand, she saw that it was not from the small up-state garrison. It was stamped in the metropolis. Freddy must have arrived.

Babette could not resist the temptation. She opened the missive.

Fred wrote that he had come to surprise her, but before that he had had to take care of a confidential matter. A duel over a man's honor. And he lay wounded on his cot. Babette should not write to him. He begged for secrecy and faith.

One can put various interpretations on a phrasing. The confidential matter that was delaying the lieutenant, could be called "Mucky."

He had brought her along.

He had imagined himself bound to make some settlement for her, before he bade her farewell. To this end he has bought her the Sunday fashion supplements.

They had studied the many advertisements together. There was a lot of vacancies that seemed suitable for "Mucky," and so "Mucky" had come along to simplify the choice.

Babette Bomberling

What a hero, Babette had thought, as she read the letter. The first letter from Freddy that she really liked, and she had wanted to bring pain to such a man!

She compared him to her skating friend. Days and years would pass before he improved the world. What was even good Paul, who sat in a warm studio and drew sketches for other people's coffins in comparison to such a man, who risked death for honor, who now lay on a bed of pain, alone and suffering!

These sad thoughts made Babette glow inwardly. It was snowing. She resolved to buy soft, wonderful roses, and leave them at his address at twilight.

"I am going out for some flowers," she said trying to avoid showing her tear-stained face.

That was easy this time, for Mrs. Bomberling only glanced up to say:

"Be punctual for lunch, my child."

Then she hustled to her own occupations. She was busy with her own plans, which held many ambitions. The baroness would soon be there. Possibly she had an un-

Babette Bomberling

married son, or at least a nephew. There is always some young man of marriagable age in every proper family.

A bell sounded.

The maid brought a card on her salver, saying a lady had come, wearing a great many furs, so she had shown her into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Bomberling took the card and said correctively:

"That is not a lady, that is a baroness."

The girl should know with whom she was in service.

Then she hurried out.

A few words about the weather were exchanged politely. It was cold. It snowed. If it got warmer the snow would surely melt.

With such words we thaw ourselves. The baroness opened her furs.

She said it was not pleasant to talk of oneself, and yet it might interest Mrs. Bomberling that she was not only a baroness, but that she had a profession too. A beautiful and praiseworthy profession, that

Babette Bomberling

had been practiced by the gods themselves in the olden times.

Mrs. Bomberling did not understand.

She excused herself, saying that in the school she had attended, it had just been the old gods who had had a very poor pedagogic representative. She had been able to retain very little of it.

The baroness had to come to the point.

Her eyes cast on the mink muff, she explained that she played the part of cupid in society. That marriages are made in heaven, but that she arranged them.

"No!" said Mrs. Bomberling in open admiration.

"Yes, indeed," said the baroness, now quicker and surer, "I have a select assortment. Innocently divorced men, widowers, eligible officials, doctors, sportsmen and cultured merchants with high and vast incomes in all ages from 26 to 42, always stand at my disposal."

She took a breath in order to be able to add, that she had established herself in 1896.

Mrs. Bomberling smiled politely in baffled admiration, for it was not evident to

Babette Bomberling

her how one could establish oneself. A short thoughtful pause ensued.

And yet the establishing of the baroness had been simpler than many another beginning.

We are ennobled by our deeds. She had begun with this principle. An order for two thousand visiting-cards had raised her to her title. They had become her stock in trade. Today the cards were engraved. She had advanced.

And yet as the Baroness Pryczsbitzky-Ratzoska sat before Mrs. Bomberling, her withered face thickly powdered, the pompous bill-board of mink hiding a shabby velvet dress, and the whiff of cheap scent about her, she did not appear to be made happy by this continual rushing about, on her divine mission. Perhaps she might have renounced her rank and the success of all the marriages if she had succeeded in one—her own. If Pryczsbitzky had not vanished, leaving her nothing but his sneeze of a name! It was really remarkable to think how much she had made of it. She may have been thinking something of the sort, in this quiet

Babette Bomberling

moment, while both women were nibbling at caviar on toast.

'The elastic laugh had slipped off her face, and left it helpless, tired and old, as she said:

"We all want to live, before we die."

Then, recollecting herself, she quickly resumed her smile, and said that a certain nobleman of her acquaintance seemed to be born to become a beloved member of the house of Bomberling.

"Titled?" Mrs. Bomberling almost shrieked the word.

The baroness said that she knew from their mutual friend that the Bomberlings had their subscription seats at the opera tonight. If it were certain that Mrs. Bomberling and her husband would attend the performance, the gentleman she was thinking of would procure a seat to see Mrs. Bomberling.

"Me?" asked Mrs. Bomberling reddening.

"Yes," said the baroness. "Young men vary so nowadays. Some want to see the daughter, others the mother. The young man in question today wants to see the

Babette Bomberling

mother only. Otherwise it is too much like buying a cat in a bag."

Mrs. Bomberling tried to catch her reflection in the cup cabinet. She was embarrassed. If it had not been the wish of an aristocrat, she would most emphatically have said "NO."

However, after some pros and cons, she could not resist the proposition.

The baroness asked politely for the location of the seats, and quickly noted the row and numbers in a tiny book. She would telegraph them to the young man immediately.

She would charge this to Mrs. Bomberling in the meanwhile, also the taxi which had brought her, for, as she may have observed, it had unfortunately been snowing.

She stood up and began to close her furs.

"What are they playing?" she asked. "Some great work of Verdi or Wagner?"

Mrs. Bomberling said some light modern thing would be given.

"That is splendid," cried the baroness, enthusiastically. "It is much easier to get

Babette Bomberling

the men to come to these. The effect on their emotions is better too."

She would speak to the young nobleman after the performance, and bring the answer tomorrow forenoon. She was in a great hurry now. Business was urgent.

"Before Christmas every minute of mine is precious," she explained smiling. "They all want to announce their engagement Christmas morning. Yes, yes, people are a queer lot."

The narrow kid gloves encased the fat hands fairly well now.

The door came to with a bang after the Baroness Pryczsbitzky-Ratzoska.

Only the mixed odor of a perfumery shop still hung over the English castle furniture, each piece of which stood perfectly in its prescribed spot.

Beyond the windows lay twilight. It softened sharp contrasts kindly, veiled coarse outlines, shaded hard lines.

But in the bedroom where Mrs. Bomberling was getting ready for the opera a merciless light shone. Anna stood before the bright mirror. It was polished, and yet

Babette Bomberling

candid, as a well-brought-up person would never be.

Anna sighed. She thought she might perhaps have done more for her appearance this winter than she had.

With a harassed expression she got out her jewelry and began to polish it. This should at least look new and shiny.

She had not adorned herself with such precision since her wedding day.

Should she risk putting on a bit of rouge? Perhaps the man in question was near-sighted.

A tap at the door frightened Anna, and put a flush in her cheeks naturally.

It was only Babette, about to start with her roses. She mumbled something about purchasing some notes and gave her mother a tender kiss. Anna responded and gently caressing Babette's hair, resolved to pull her laces still tighter. The happiness of her only daughter was worth this small sacrifice. Courageously she turned to her mirror again.

The while Babette crossed the big city in the dusk. At the address at the head of

Babette Bomberling

the letter Babette 'climbed up the stairs. All the doors of the flats had cards with strange names in the little tin frames. Finally "Frederick Wagner" at the very top.

Babette stopped irresolute. She did not seem to have the courage to touch the shabby bell.

She stepped back with terror. Someone had screamed beyond the door. Was her hero dying? No—there was singing.

The song became noisier and more clear. She could catch the words now. The voice of a man yelling:

"On the balcony of Columbine
Two sat and ate a philipine,
'Pine, 'pine, 'pine."

Many other voices chimed in on "'pine, 'pine, 'pine."

Babette was horrified. How could anyone make such a racket in a flat where a man lay sick, a wounded hero?

She rang energetically. No one opened.

"'Pine, 'pine, 'pine," was roared in constant iteration.

Babette had to ring repeatedly, till finally steps dragged nearer.

Babette Bomberling

The door opened a little. A rotund woman had lowered the latch with her elbow. Her hands were fully occupied with a big cup brimful of coffee and a large piece of cake. Confused, Babette asked if Lieutenant Wagner roomed here. Grinning, the woman nodded toward the noise in back of her, and said:

“Rather!”

“How is he? Is he resting? Or sleeping?” whispered Babette.

The woman grinned more broadly at this witticism, and said if he kept on guzzling at this rate, he would soon be.

But she should come in now. She did not intend to heat the stairway. She was probably another cousin of the Lieutenant's. Two were there already. But then, a birthday comes but once a year.

“'Pine, 'pine, 'pine,” sounded from the end of the hall.

Babette had not realized that Freddy was supposed to be celebrating his birthday. She knew that he was born in May. She had thought just this so charming of him.

Babette Bomberling

A door was torn open down the narrow hall. A chorus of hoarse voices yowled:

"Booze, booze. Get a gait on, old lady. Get another bottle."

The fat woman revolved slowly with her cake and coffee.

"Take your time," she grumbled.

But when she looked back the strange girl was gone. She pushed the door with her foot, and forgot the incident.

Babette fled, choking with fear and disgust. At home she found her parents had left.

Herman was not there either. She was all alone.

She locked her door and took the red roses out of their wrapping. Babette removed a few leaves that the sharp cold had blackened, cut the stems carefully, and set them in lukewarm salt water. The while lukewarm, salt water was dripping into their chalices.

It was very quiet in the room, only the clock ticked on.

When Fate means best, we are most angry at it.

Babette Bomberling

But eventually Babette had fallen asleep—as peacefully as one sleeps at seventeen, when one has cried one's heart out.

It was late when some taps on her door awoke her.

Herman's voice talking French, which he always did when he wanted to tell his sister something their servants or parents were not meant to hear.

Babette sprang up in fright. This French brought everything back.

“——*Je ne vous aime pas, je ne*——”

“Do you hear me, or are you sleeping, Babs?” asked Herman raising his voice. “I would be awfully obliged *si tu pouvais me donner vingt marks.*”

Babs said:

“*Oui*, I'll give them to you at breakfast.

“*Tu es une ange, ma chère,*” cried Herman and gave an assuring bang on the door with his strong fist.

The crackling money prevented Herman noticing his *chère soeur's* tear-stained eyes. We don't look unnecessarily long into the eyes of those from whom we receive money.

Babette Bomberling

He slipped the notes into his pocket, lit a cigarette and said:

“As soon as I have discovered an instrument for perpetual motion, you’ll get it back with interest. So-long.”

Then he left. Liane Violetta should have flowers and candy today. The gloomy winter days depressed her so.

Babette stayed at the breakfast table. The room wasn’t light or dark. Napoleon, his eyes half-closed, squatted on his perch and didn’t move. There was a fragrance of coffee and pine and salami.

Babs almost wished her mother would come and cross-question her. Why she was so sad, why she had cried. That she would take her in her arms and hold her till Babette had told her everything, and weeping, had confessed to her that all men were bad, and that she would always stay with her beloved mother.

She longed so for someone upon whom she could pour her entire affection.

Perhaps this moment could have made mother and daughter friends for life.

If only Anna had not been so entirely

Babette Bomberling

absorbed with Babette's welfare, that she had no glance left for her.

She counted the minutes till the baroness would appear. And with her the answer, the answer of an aristocrat.

She was as agitated as though she herself were to become engaged.

She would not forget the previous evening as long as she lived. She was certain of that.

The entire house had seemed filled with future sons-in-law. Every man had gazed on her severely, smilingly, critically, scornfully—from narrow eyes and round ones—from glasses, goggles and monocles; looks had bored through her.

She had not dared to move, not to clear her throat or to cough, scarcely to breathe, but she had smiled. Smiled continuously.

How tightly she had been laced!

She had every right to a favorable answer. Her impatience was excusable. She ran from room to room nervously. Looked for her keys, couldn't find her lorgnette, got angry about a stray dust-cloth.

Babette had been able to think of nothing

Babette Bomberling

better than to try the morning ice for a change.

To her surprise she found her brother there.

Herman also sought Nature for consolation.

Liane had received the flowers and chocolates, but not him. Every class has its code. She had sent him a message that people do not receive in the morning when an afternoon appointment has been made. There must be order.

Herman had to admit that. There must be order, otherwise why should he study law?

But if he could only have gotten another glimpse at the new galoshes next the umbrella-stand. They had seemed so remarkably large. As though they fitted men's shoes.

Silently brother and sister skated side by side.

After a while the economist appeared over the smooth surface. With a graceful arabesque he swooped upon them.

Babette Bomberling

Soon he was talking about the M. O.—of moral obligations and free love. He spoke only in general, much as we talk about life's problems, when we are about to better the world.

But Herman put a stop to this. He said these were no subjects for sisters. He could dig up this sort of cleverness with his lady friends but not in the presence of Babette.

The national economist said he counted Babette among his friends.

Whereupon Herman gave him a blow.

His friend returned it.

Ice is more slippery than the usual floor of life. Now both were rolling on the frozen water, in a tight grip.

When they got up again their friendship had suffered a chill. They separated without a word of parting.

Babette helped brush the snow off Herman's coat, then they left the ice.

"Now you know you have a' brother, don't you?" said Herman, most satisfied.

He stopped at the next *confiserie*.

Babette Bomberling

"You might stand me a hot chocolate," said he.

Babs was not averse to eating a piece of apple pie with whipped cream.

They entered.

"You might really pay this once," said she. "I have not bought any Christmas gifts as yet."

"Impossible," said Herman.

He wanted to spend on Liane all he had left of the twenty marks.

For had he not just demonstrated that he knew definitely what was due a sister and what was due a sweetheart?

* * * * *

While the heated argument was taking place on the ice, Bomberlings' heated rooms had been the scene of a frosty meeting.

The baroness had been late.

After she had inquired politely, if Mrs. Bomberling had enjoyed the performance, and whether the artists had been in voice, she finally said the nobleman had been there too.

"Where did he sit?" Mrs. Bomberling

Babette Bomberling

asked breathlessly. "There were so many that resembled him."

"Who might have resembled him," she corrected herself, hastily, when she noticed the astonished look of her visitor.

"Yes—he was there—and—"

"And?" pressed Anna.

"My dear lady, I regret to have to tell you the truth.—You are too corpulent for the gentleman."

It was out. A deep silence ensued.

The things we think silently of another, do not mortify.

After a long while Mrs. Bomberling brought, with a deep sigh from her heaving bosom:

"And this person claims to be of noble birth?"

The baroness smiled courteously.

"Don't take it to heart, Mrs. Bomberling. Tastes differ so. You couldn't imagine how fastidious the young men of today are."

And she narrated, that some want only ladies without an appendix, others those without parents or sisters, and many even designate exactly how small the nose must be.

Babette Bomberling

"Only the dowry must invariably be large," she said offended. "It isn't easy for me either, my dear, believe me."

Mrs. Bomberling did not seem to hear a word of all this. Wounded vanity was whistling around her ears.

She began to pay attention only when the baroness said:

"I wanted to make another proposition. I have a five-story houseowner, with a lot of real estate."

"Oh, that is surely an old man," interrupted Mrs. Bomberling, dismissing him—"In the piece last night the daughter, who was 'way past her first youth, got such an attractive aviator. Rich and young and so handsome in his costume."

The baroness commented that aviators are usually low people, whose one ambition is to rise as quickly as possible.

"To be sure! On the stage it all looks lovely," she added bitterly. "But it's different in life. Here the men who have really serious intentions, all have been run down a bit by life. Why should they marry otherwise?"

Babette Bomberling

She shrugged her shoulders and sighed.

Perhaps she was thinking of her Pryczbitzky. Perhaps she was put out that she seemed to be wasting her precious time here. And it so near Christmas!

"Your daughter is pretty," she began again. "If you did more entertaining—but naturally—many can't swallow the coffins, in this nervous age. Perhaps you had better wait till Spring. A trip abroad—"

She stood up and began to button her cloak.

"As I said, the landlord—a look at him costs nothing. I shall send him to you New Year's Day. He can make a short call and bring a message from our mutual friend."

Mrs. Bomberling didn't say "yes"—neither did she say "no."

The baroness opened her glistening bag and took out a blue envelope, decorated with a big red crest.

"However it may be," she said "every year has its accounting. May I ask you to regulate the small expenses of this one?"

Babette Bomberling

Mrs. Bomberling opened the letter, took her lorgnette and read.

Although her acquaintance with the charming baroness had been short, the bill was long.

The conversations of yesterday and to-day were called consultations, and charged accordingly. The taxis were added. Mrs. Bomberling was to pay for the ticket of the nobleman, who had thought her too fat. He had sat on a very good seat.

The baroness cleared her throat with emphasis. Mrs. Bomberling became embarrassed, ceased her perusal, picked up her purse and paid the sum total.

"It has been a great pleasure, *au revoir*," said the baroness and sailed out.

When Mrs. Bomberling sat at her desk to book this expenditure, she did not know what to call it. After some hesitation she placed the unpleasant sum in the column, "Fuel."

She recollected that August and she had met without cost. She shook her head reflectively while she laid the blotter neatly between the pages.

Babette Bomberling

She was forgetting that the ancient gods were still active in those days. They could afford to be cheap, even with enormous distances. They had wings.

* * * * *

A snow shoveler sat on the Bomberlings' house and threw the deep snow into the area below.

As it was a time job, he paused now and then, in spite of the airiness of his perch. He would blow on his stiff hands, and leaning forward a little, would peek into the warm rooms of the rich folks. The gray day had made most of them draw back their curtains.

Most was to be seen at Bomberlings'. They had turned on the lights early.

He could see a little canary ruffling his feathers near the window. Further in the room, there was a brightly colored picture on the wall; what it was supposed to be he couldn't decide, but the wide gilt frame told him it was a fine picture.

The table under the chandelier was the prettiest of all. There a family sat and ate. A fat gentleman, with a napkin tucked in

Babette Bomberling

his collar, a fat lady, with a high blond hair arrangement, another fat, but younger gentleman and a slim and blond young miss.

It was like a "movie." They moved, their mouths clapped open and shut, nothing could be heard.

Grinning, he took up his shovel again. The snow flopped down in heavy thuds.

When he leaned forward again, a pretty maid was passing a large platter to each. Everyone filled his plate.

"Lucky folks! They might well be content—"

But even from a roof one cannot see into the hearts of people.

The only reason Herman ate was not to seem unpleasant. He was still angry at the economist; and besides, he could think of nothing but the large galoshes in Liane's entry.

Anna was nervously wondering whether every bite she swallowed was adding to her weight. Sadly she looked across at Babette who sat so innocently before her plate

Babette Bomberling

and did not guess her own mother was an obstacle to her happiness.

Babs was not noticing anything, mechanically nibbling her food. She did not look up. Now and then she passed her slim fingers over her forehead, as though she would smooth the thoughts behind it. She must talk to Paul today. He was the only one who understood her. She would work like a man from now on; start out in the gray dawn with her lunch in her bag.

Bomberling chewed noisily. He was thinking of the coming annual inventory. He was calculating. Sharp lines crossed his round, jovial face.

Thus each was drawing his own balance, while they silently ate together and occasionally exchanged words unrelated to their thoughts.

The ring of the door-bell promised an interruption, but it was only Aunt Helen. She was annoyed that her relatives were still at the table, although she could not very well have expected otherwise. She did not wish to disturb. No indeed, she would go again immediately. And then she was

Babette Bomberling

seated between Bomberling and Babette.

The man on the roof had watched all this with curiosity.

"She would sweeten no meal," he thought, and better satisfied, he crept to the other side of the roof.

"Thanks, I have eaten," said Aunt Helen.

But when the maid passed on with the meat-platter, she recalled it angrily. While she heaped her plate with everything, she said:

"Roast beef. You shouldn't eat so much beef. You can surely afford poultry."

"Do you think poultry is less fattening?" asked Anna.

"I know nothing about that," said Helen, chewing. "Nothing makes me stout."

After she had eaten a while she turned to Bomberling and said she wanted a favor of him.

"Out with it," answered August kindly, drying his mustache with the napkin.

"I want to ask you for a certificate for a coffin. It can be plain, but should look nice too."

Babette Bomberling

A painful silence. One was not supposed to speak of coffins at the Bomberlings'.

"What do you want it for?" asked August.

"My servant-girl's father has been sick so long. I want to give her this certificate, besides several little necessities, for Christmas."

"I can't give her cash," she added sharply. "I am not in a position to do that."

"A jolly substitute for cash," laughed Herman merrily.

"My, but that is an awful present!" said Mrs. Bomberling unusually emotional, "the old man may get well again."

"Then he saves the certificate for later on. We are all mortal. Some day he'll need it well enough."

Although her mouth could only smile, her voice had become unpleasantly sharp.

Bomberling, who loved peace and quiet above all, had taken out his note-book to make out the desired certificate.

Aunt Helen thanked and hurriedly stuck the paper into her black-silk bag.

"The gift of a coffin won't make a person die any sooner," said she. "But if we are un-

Babette Bomberling

lucky, we can break a finger in the nose—”

Bomberling had risen and was declaring that he had to return to his office in spite of the dear guest.

“Don’t let me keep you,” said Aunt Helen. “I’ll enjoy staying alone with Anna.”

Anna looked weary. The forenoon had been exhausting; she was used to a nap.

She said that she must go out almost immediately—Christmas shopping.

“Then I’ll accompany you,” said Aunt Helen cheerfully, and sat down again.

Herman said:

“If I’m not home in the evening, Pater—don’t worry—examinations coming—”

Babs begged to accompany her father; she wanted to try the new typewriter.

“Is it thawing?” asked Bomberling astonished.

But Babette had skipped off to fetch her hat and coat.

Various doors opened and closed with a bang.

“I must tell you that I have come on Babette’s account,” said Aunt Helen as

Babette Bomberling

soon as the house had quieted down. "I trust you have realized—that she has reached a marriageable age?"

Mrs. Bomberling was extraordinarily astonished. She had not dreamt of such a thing.

Aunt Helen remarked how fortunate it is that we have relatives. Mothers are so often blind to their children's welfare.

She had met a young man, wealthy, young and charming. For the first time she regretted that she had no children, no daughter.

Mrs. Bomberling was silent. People are skeptical about ideas emanating from the family circle; wonders do not usually come from that source.

Aunt Helen continued:

"A highly cultured man, understands every foreign word, and runs everything with steam."

Anna yawned, but asked what he might be driving with steam.

"His sausage factory, naturally," said Aunt Helen triumphantly. "Founded by his father. A gold-mine!"

Babette Bomberling

"NEVER," said Mrs. Bomberling, and got up.

It was time to go Christmas shopping.

Silently they got ready and took the street-car.

"A sausage factory is no disgrace," said Aunt Helen, when they had squeezed into the crowded car.

Mrs. Bomberling was thinking of the nobleman, and planned to have herself weighed at the department store.

"You shouldn't crave what you can't get." Aunt Helen was speaking again. "Of course, you'll want a title for her, like some of your swell friends."

She laughed loudly.

The car had gotten speed now, and the rattle and clank on the frozen pavement, made all these intimate revelations totally indistinguishable.

Anna only saw Helen laughing, so she smiled politely.

They conversed this way until they reached their destination.

There was a dense crowd in the shop, pushing as in a steam-driven sausage-ma-

Babette Bomberling

chine. Mrs. Bomberling remarked that there were astonishingly many pretty young girls. They pushed merrily. Would all these get a husband sooner or later?

She leaned against Helen, who was breaking a way for them with her sharp and bony elbows. She cleared her throat and said:

"Of course, you can bring your new acquaintance to us, if you care to. The friends of our relations are our friends too."

Paul had just concluded that thaw could not be expected yet—when Babette stood before him.

Bomberling, who followed, hurriedly slipped off his fur coat, saying: "She wants to learn typewriting—take her in hand, I'm busy."

A large order had come. A mining catastrophe. The price had not yet been agreed on.

Bomberling was already at the telephone. "Once our customer, always our customer," he yelled.

Babette drew Paul into the second room where the typewriters were. Paul had his

Babette Bomberling

hand at his neck—"You must pardon, Babette my tie has—"

Babs laughed, "Who would notice such things here?" she comforted him.

And then she said that she had come on his account. With a great and solemn plea, he must speak with papa and mamma. She lacked the courage.

"Babette!" cried Paul. It seemed as though he would seize her, but he only took hold of the nearest chair-back.

"Yes," said Babs, "I can't stand it at home. Breakfast, lunch, dinner that is the routine. Tuesday fish, Wednesday roast beef and Sunday chicken. I can predict for years ahead. I am stifling under it all."

"And I—actually I—" said Paul.

"Yes, you must tell them, for I shall never marry. I know it now."

"Oh—Oh—" said Paul. He released the chair. "But what do you want?"

"To work. Since Herman won't, I should like to take over papa's factory later on."

Paul smiled. As she stood before him, slender, fair and charming,—she, the femi-

Babette Bomberling

nine head of a coffin factory!—he burst out laughing.

Babs blushed violently.

She said there was nothing to laugh at.

Since centuries she had been suppressed. That was over now.

Paul said that she did not show the centuries.

“You have suppressed women,” corrected Babs, “but that is ended.”

And now Paul had many of the thoughts and theories of the thrashed student of economics recited to him.

“I shall eventually enlarge and improve all this, and I shall use my fortune to found an orphan asylum.”

For Babs loved little children dearly.

Paul continued to smile and said that she was progressing enormously, that she ran one, two, three over the whole of life.

Babs declared that if he mock her today, she would dismiss him as soon as she had a word to say, but if he would stand by her, she would engage him for life.

Paul called this bribery. But he was a mere man—he would help her.

Babette Bomberling

He asked what she wished to learn.

"Everything."

Paul suggested beginning with bookkeeping and stenography.

Babs removed her charming turban, pushed back the blond curl that the momentous talk had loosened, and sat down.

Paul got a big new book of accounts and took the place at her side. He commenced by explaining that double entry, called Italian, was the usual form of bookkeeping—debit and credit.

Attentively Babette moved closer to Paul.

The further women strive from men, the nearer they approach them.

A mother rushes from one duty to another.

Mrs. Bomberling decided that she must do something to get thinner. She would not risk Babette's chance of happiness a second time.

Helen had mentioned a physician yesterday who cured wealthy people to emaciation. She must hunt him up.

But in the forenoon she must trim the

Babette Bomberling

tree. Day after tomorrow was Christmas.

Babs helped her mother with the decorations. Her territory was the top of the spruce where Mrs. Bomberling did not dare climb. From a chair, mounted on a table, she fastened a large, golden star to the top, and directly beneath it a fat, wax angel, that blew "Peace on earth" from a glass bugle.

Meanwhile Babs spoke of her plans, of work and independence.

Mrs. Bomberling, with head tilted, looked whether the gold tinsel was well distributed. Ever and again she shook another tinsel-filled envelope over the branches.

She did not take Babs's words to heart.

She knew from her charity club that all young girls of her age talked that way. All the ladies had complained about it.

One must not contradict them, but rather, see to it that they meet the right man soon.

"You'll see all I can do. I'll have a career," called Babette from on high and set the fat angel swinging.

"You won't have to," Mrs. Bomberling

Babette Bomberling

said gently and handed her daughter an extra large package of tinsel.

"If it amuses you, you may learn a little bookkeeping. Who knows, it may be useful later on." And she thought Babette's household would be so large some day that she would need double entry.

In the afternoon she called up the famous physician.

His housekeeper answered saying that the doctor could be consulted only in the forenoon, that his practice was so extensive, he had to attend a funeral every afternoon.

Mrs. Bomberling made an appointment for the next morning. In spite of Christmas, she wanted to start reducing before New Year's.

Anna was not used to medical consultations. She had always been healthy, even her teeth still sat in a faultless row.

All this was apparent to the doctor at the first glance while he asked Mrs. Bomberling to take a chair.

She was embarrassed. She had expected a doctor with a gray beard and spectacles. Instead she sat opposite a man who was

Babette Bomberling

measuring her with sharp eyes from a clean-shaven face.

On the recital of her complaints, he stated that she had evidently done physical work in her youth; that she was not of city origin.

Mrs. Bomberling hesitated, twisting the golden chain of her lorgnette.

The doctor said that she must confide everything to her physician. That she could rely on him absolutely.

So Mrs. Bomberling confessed to the paternal smithy, to washing the laundry in the brook, and finally even to the housework. But added that that was all in the dim and distant past.

"So I see," said the doctor.

Anna could not determine whether that remark was due her sables or herself.

Now the physician began to speak. Quietly and to the point, he declared it is an unfortunate fact, and one not to be gainsaid, that prosperity is unhealthy and harmful. Every soul needs its body, but that it gets uncomfortable when it increases continuously.

He smiled while disgusting words like, fatty degeneration of the heart, arterioscle-

Babette Bomberling

rosis, and many others, gruesomely mysterious, passed his lips.

"Must I die?" stammered Mrs. Bomberling, her light blue eyes brimming.

"That depends wholly upon yourself," said the doctor with a polite inclination.

Anyone would have been delighted with this answer.

Mrs. Bomberling dried her tears, and gave confident attention to what was forthcoming.

She was questioned whether she could not simply resume all the housework again.

She had to reply that this would be impossible. The maids would not respect her, and she couldn't dismiss them either. What would the world say to that? The janitor and her friend the widow, her acquaintances and the baroness? No.

"Then we must resort to gymnastics," interrupted the doctor—"trunk forward bend, knee-bend—"

He noted a lot of exercises and explained them.

"Creeping on all fours has produced exceptional results," he continued.

Babette Bomberling

"Creep around your bedroom, morning, noon and night."

"Creep?" asked Mrs. Bomberling surprised.

"You needn't let it embarrass you, he said calmly. "The women of the upper Four-hundred are doing it. It is really fashionable."

He was turning the pages of a note-book. He was searching for something.

"Now we come to the diet," he said getting more lively.

"Do you like to eat chocolate? Sweets? Pastry?"

"Immensely," said Mrs. Bomberling well pleased.

"Excellent," said the doctor.

"But I have heard that sweets—"

Mrs. Bomberling looked at the doctor with shy embarrassment.

"Are to be absolutely avoided. Quite right," continued the physician. "But I would advise you to eat a piece of candy before each meal. That will kill your appetite. It is important that you eat very little and nothing fatty, and when you are thirsty, don't drink, just rinse your mouth."

Babette Bomberling

Mrs. Bomberling was given a diet. It was not as long as the list of exercises.

Then she paid and was dismissed.

As she passed through the door, she stopped to ask whether all this would really help her.

"Doubtlessly, my dear madam. An elephant would emaciate from it." And punctuated her pleading look with a polite bow, which however came to a brief end, for he had taken out his watch and opened the door of the waiting-room.

* * * * *

It was Christmas Eve. A family party.

But a party with just the members of the family is no fun. It only has that appearance.

All dressed up, those who are accustomed to seeing each other continually, must beam on one another, as though they scarce knew another's name. That is uncomfortable!

Bomberling stood at the gift table in the drawing-room admiring the seal of the Egyptian mummy.

"You are holding it upside down, my dear," said Anna. "The man from whom I

Babette Bomberling

bought it, showed me from which side to look at it."

August gazed at the hieroglyphics from the other side obediently.

Babette and Herman played a Christmas carol for piano and violin.

On the curve of the piano lay a heart of almond paste, Hilda Wagner had sent it. It carried Babette's thoughts to tender memories.

Herman was thinking that he would be accompanying Liane's songs on this same violin tomorrow. He played with a lot of feeling.

Their parents sat in the great armchairs.

Anna was drying her tears with a handkerchief. How beautifully the children were playing! How refined! This playing would have edified the most aristocratic man.

She was vexed with Bomberling, who sat, staring at the Christmas tree, plainly showing that music was but inconsequent noise to him.

Bomberling was thinking of the past, of the days when the children's music consisted of tin trumpets. He was young in those

Babette Bomberling

days, and had spoken his mind without fear of etiquette.

The music ceased. They went to dinner.

As quietly as the candles on the tree, the hours of the evening simmered out, until they could bid one another "good-night."

Mrs. Bomberling had given herself a Christmas present. A small pair of scales which would indicate her daily loss of weight.

She followed the doctor's instructions with her entire innate righteousness.

Three times a day she crawled like a turtle and went through her exercises like a recruit. That was exhausting, but she endured it all with a secret, beatific smile. She knew she was doing something for Babette's happiness.

Radiant with confidence, she looked toward the New Year that was to begin with the owner of the five-story house.

Before that came New Year's Eve.

The Christmas tree was lit a second time, but today the little lights snapped and flickered merrily. Laughter and chattering enlivened the air. Not only were Hilda and

Babette Bomberling

Paul there. Between Uncle Albert and Aunt Helen sat the new acquaintance—the sausage manufacturer, Christian Sebold.

When Christian Sebold was introduced to Mrs. Bomberling, that good soul had to master her enthusiasm not to hold both hands out to him. With a thrill in her heart she looked across at Babs, who was joking with Paul. Here was a man to please anyone. Large and broad-shouldered, with a vigorous blond moustache and a colored velvet vest with the most adorable buttons, distinguished and genial.

They became acquainted immediately. He sat among them all as though he had always sat there, and whatever they talked about, he was well versed in.

Hilda Wagner mentioned Italy. Her aunt was going there.

“An advanced and competent land,” exclaimed Christian Sebold, stroking his moustache.

They inquired interestedly whether he had ever been there.

“No,” said he, “not yet, but I am in continual communication with it. All the mor-

Babette Bomberling

tadella from Bologna, all the salami from Napoli of the gulf of Napoli, Italia."

"What euphony!" remarked Mrs. Bomberling.

And thus their conversation ran on, pleasant, lively and instructive.

Only Uncle Albert was tired.

"No wonder," said Aunt Helen. "He never gets among people. We are alone at home every evening."

We are often more candid than we realize.

Christian Sebold got out his letter-case.

"All that can be altered," he said cordially to Aunt Helen handing her a pass to the "Gloom Dispellers' Club" of which he was president.

"Agreeable entertainment for everyone that comes, every evening."

"Conversation!" said Albert unpleasantly. "Each waits till the other has stopped talking, only so he may begin again. That's all."

He had a slight liver complaint, and had been scrapping with Aunt Helen all day long. She had called his house-shoes, night-shoes. He had explained that one said

Babette Bomberling

morning-shoes too. Whereupon she had declared that one was as good as another. He was only waiting till they were alone again.

"Let us end the old year merrily," sang out Christian Sebold, hitting Uncle Albert good-naturedly on the shoulder.

"His wife will lead a happy existence," thought Mrs. Bomberling.

It delighted her that Babette joked and laughed a lot with Christian Sebold. She was quite different from the last few days.

Babs thought Freddy might ask his sister how Babette had been on New Year's Eve. Gay, very gay, should be Hilda's answer.

For that reason she played the piano, sang, and solved the conundrums put by Christian Sebold.

When it struck twelve, they filled their glasses.

"For luck and health and happiness," sang out Christian Sebold, going to each one with a firm step.

Bomberling did not join in all this. He only went to Babette and gently caressed her hair.

Babette Bomberling

Mrs. Bomberling said, her handkerchief to her nose:

"It's a great pity our Herman isn't here tonight."

An important engagement with a friend, was keeping Herman from home.

"We must stumble over the sill of the New Year together, old dear," Liane had said—

"Have you wished Mr. Sebold, 'Happy New Year,' my child?" asked Mrs. Bomberling, giving her Babette a New Year's kiss.

"I suppose so," said Babs.

"Do you like this fat sausage man?" asked Paul.

"I suppose so," said Babs, yawning a little.

They broke up late—

Today Mrs. Bomberling didn't crawl around her room, although Bomberling had fallen asleep immediately and would have noticed nothing. She said to herself that Christian Sebold was so broad-minded, he would not care whether the mother of his bride weighed a pound more or less.

Reassured that there were still some good

Babette Bomberling

men in the world, she soon fell asleep, smiling.

* * * * *

New Year's Day dawned, gray and morose, as though it were a tatter of the old year.

Bomberling rode to his office. The factory was naturally closed, but the office had to be open. No holiday was holy for the great agent, who restlessly cared for the turnover of Bomberling's wares.

Babette had gone to church with Hilda. She was curious to see if it were true that the new parson who was said to be a poet, could preach so wonderfully.

In the afternoon they were going sleighing with Christian Sebold.

Mrs. Bomberling was counting the silver that had been used last evening. The fragrance of a big roast and the whiff of baked apples came from the kitchen. She was in a holiday mood.

Then came a piercing shriek from the maid in the adjoining room.

Thumps and a clash.

Mrs. Bomberling rushed in just in time

Babette Bomberling

to see Napoleon melt into the snowy distance, like a little butter-ball. A moment more and he was gone.

He seemed to prefer his liberty to imprisonment, just like his illustrious predecessor, the great Napoleon.

They inquired through the whole neighborhood, hoping he had flown into one of the nearby windows, but everyone had only his own bird in its cage.

The janitor's wife said that the police ought to be notified. They might be able to help. They could have all the neighboring houses searched. Perhaps even find him.

Mrs. Bomberling hastened to the telephone and called up the nearest station-house.

But a dicky-bird can escape more quickly than be caught. First Mrs. Bomberling had to state the name, address and occupation of the owner.

Then they asked:

"When did the canary fly away?"

"Where to?"

Unfortunately Mrs. Bomberling didn't know this.

Babette Bomberling

"Especial marks of identification?"

"Yellow," cried Mrs. Bomberling.

"Surname?"

"Napoleon."

"What?"

"Napoleon."

Now there was a pause.

Mrs. Bomberling could distinctly hear the turning of pages. Then nothing further.

"Are you there?" cried Mrs. Bomberling.

"Not there, but here. Say, tell me with how many 'p's' you write Napoleon."

Mrs. Bomberling hesitated. She didn't know, and little Napoleon might be devoured by a cat at any moment!

"With two," she cried desperately decisive. Rather too many than too few, thought she.

"All right, when we get him, you shall have him. Good-bye."

As Mrs. Bomberling hung up the receiver and turned around quite exhausted, she found a dapper little man standing before her. He bowed before Mrs. Bomberling,

Babette Bomberling

his yellow-gloved hands neatly holding a top-hat and a bunch of roses.

He hoped he was not disturbing and excused his entering through the wide-open door. He was bringing a greeting from her friend the professor's widow. Besides, might he permit himself to remark that to the best of his modest knowledge, Napoleon was spelt with only one "p."

The little man was the owner of the five-story house, but Mrs. Bomberling thought Napoleon's finder was before her. Joyously, she cried:

"Have you got him?"

The smiling little man reiterated that he had nothing to bring but the regards of her friend.

At last Mrs. Bomberling understood.

She measured him with a brief but severe look. She compared him with Christian Sebold. That was his finish.

"Prill," said the little man and bowed, alarmed before the august stare. "Rentier Prill."

"An unfortunate moment," said Mrs. Bomberling.

Babette Bomberling

"I heard so. I regret it extremely, but if we wait, the little birdie will come back," said Mr. Prill, sitting down and placing the roses carefully on the center table. Mrs. Bomberling sat down too; her knees were trembling. She was speechless. She could only fan herself with her perfumed handkerchief.

"Has your daughter flown away too?" the visitor asked, and bleated a short laugh.

A shriek from an adjoining room prevented a reply.

The maid ran in, and not noticing the stranger, screamed:

"Another one is missing."

Mrs. Bomberling reproved her severely. She pointed out that she never had but one bird, consequently no second one could be gone.

Only after a lot of parley, did they learn that the maid was talking about Herman. She had wanted to waken the young master but no one had answered. Then she entered and found the bed undisturbed. The young master had not come home, and it was noon.

Mr. Prill got up.

Babette Bomberling

"Then I really must not disturb any longer," bowed and left.

He took the roses too. Extreme generosity was quite unnecessary. The baroness had given him several other addresses.

Mrs. Bomberling never noticed his going. She telephoned August, her good, beloved August. He could advise.

Bomberling answered that he would come home directly. His Anna should not lose courage. "Let us hope the boy is safe and sound."

Before he started, he called up the police. When he mentioned his name, they astonished him, by reporting that up to now the search was in vain. Who could tell where he might have flown to. In his excitement Bomberling did not bother about the strange answer, but hurried home.

Anna stood at the window of the music room. She was shaking her head. So Herman had not arrived.

While Bomberling was paying the chauffeur, a second taxi stopped.

After a while the door opened, and then,

Babette Bomberling

gradually, some one climbed out. It was Herman.

He blinked at the other car and then began to search his pockets for money. It seemed in vain.

Bomberling looked up to Anna. Beaming with happiness the parents' eyes met. Bomberling approached Herman, who was still going through his pockets and said:

"All right, my boy, I'll pay."

Herman blinked at Bomberling a while, then he said:

"Oh, it's you, Dad. Why, hello. I guess I'm a little late tonight. You'll pardon me, won't you?"

He tipped his hat and reeled into the house. Upstairs Anna stood in the doorway.

"My son," said she in tears, and tried to embrace him.

But Herman dodged.

"Stop the rain, Mom, stop the rain," said he and rocked past her towards his room, like a sailboat in a storm.

And that afternoon, when Christian Sebold drove up with the ringing of sleigh-

Babette Bomberling

bells, Napoleon's twittering could not be heard in the quiet apartment—but Herman's loud snoring.

Babette wouldn't go sleighing. She had scattered bird-seed on all the window-sills and was looking out.

It was getting dark already. Tears dripped from her eyes.

"I'll go look for him once more, Babette," said Paul and went out quietly.

Bomberling couldn't bear to see her cry either.

"I'm going for a little walk," he said, after a while.

Christian Sebold remained seated, and drank hot coffee with audible relish.

"A canary is nothing so very precious," said he. "I'll bet such a little creature, even with all its feathers doesn't weigh a quarter of a pound."

The bell rang. The maid announced a Mr. Kippenbach.

A young man entered, dressed in the very latest fashion. He bowed and explained that he lived across the street, and knew the blond, young lady by sight, that he had

Babette Bomberling

something for her. He brought a little box from under his coat, and Babette found Napoleon nestling in it.

Joy was great. Her rapture was delightful.

Mr. Kippenbach was invited to sit down. He looked around and said.

"What an attractive home."

Then he explained that he was the son of Kippenbach & Son, player-pianos.

"How very interesting," said Mrs. Bomberling and remarked that they had a concert grand.

"Nice enough, but not up-to-date," answered Kippenbach smiling. "Look here—who wants to practice for years in our restless age, all in order to make a little music on Sundays? That can't be expected any more. Now however—whoever wants music—this *ennobling* Art, that lifts us out of our drudgery, the everyday world—sits down at his player-piano—and has his desires fulfilled.

"Then I go to the opera," said Christian Sebold, playing with his watch-chain. This Mr. Kippenbach grated on him.

Babette Bomberling

Mrs. Bomberling sent a mediating smile between the two blond men. Only when Mr. Kippenbach mentioned that he was an officer of the reserves, did her smile become one-sided. Nothing is more variable than a woman's favor.

Babs ran back and forth. She got bath-water for Napoleon, and sugar and little salad leaves.

Then Paul returned. He didn't observe the stranger at the tea-table. Smiling happily he hurried to Babette.

"He who looks may find," said he un-knotting a little cloth and letting Babette peep in.

"How is that possible? Which one is the right one now?" she asked and looked from Paul to Mr. Kippenbach.

Now the apartment door was unlatched and Bomberling came in smiling.

"Kippenbach," said Mr. Kippenbach making a faultless bow.

Bomberling had not noticed him. He had gone straight to Babette and was saying tenderly:

"All you have to do is send out your

Babette Bomberling

father; then tears are unnecessary," and he produced a pasteboard box over which he held a sieve carefully, and under this sat Napoleon.

Endless amazement. Exclamations—protestations of the fortunate finders.

Christian Sebold rose. He was a man too—rather—and one who might well wear his income-tax return as a boutonnière. They might pay more attention to him.

So he said now loudly, that he regretted to be the only one here without a bird. He wished Miss Babette continuous good luck in the New Year, and departed.

Kippenbach, Bomberling and Paul gathered in conference. Each was ready to take his bird back. All three birds were from the nearest fancier. He had sold all three in spite of the Sabbath quiet—at a fancy price, to be sure.

Babs fed all three and found that each bore a striking resemblance to her Napoleon.

They tried to have the birds decide for themselves. They held up the cage and called "Peep" and "Napoleon," but all three

Babette Bomberling

fluttered behind the sideboard, from which they were extracted with a great deal of fuss and bother.

Hence they decided to wait till the morning, and keep all here over night anyway.

Mr. Kippenbach pressed a long kiss on Mrs. Bomberling's hand and one still longer on Babette's slender fingers and took his leave for the day.

Paul went too, because Mrs. Bomberling could really not keep up any longer. The excitements of this restless day suddenly commenced to bear their consequences. Besides she was continually hungry in spite of the little piece of chocolate. She broke down, crying hysterically, and seemed completely exhausted.

Babette tenderly put her mother to bed.

Bomberling promised to look after Herman, who seemed to have wakened, for his snores had died out.

Only after Anna's tired limbs rested in the cool linen was she able to smile at her Babette.

"If I could only know you were happy, dear child," said she.

Babette Bomberling

And after a while, her eyes already closed, she murmured sleepily:

"Young Kippenbach seems a charming person. I like his vest almost better than Mr. Sebold's."

"I can only remember that both were gaily colored," said Babette and smiled at herself in the large pier-glass.

When we have once resolved never to marry, mere men and their vests are no longer upsetting.

In the mean time Bomberling had entered his son's room.

Herman sat reading at his desk. He didn't glance up.

"Come to supper, my boy," said Bomberling. "Mamma has retired already and Babette has a funny story to tell you."

Herman thought that his father was behaving like a real sport. He should have liked to shake his hand, but he kept stolidly silent.

"Come now, my boy. If I know your mother, there'll be a herring for you too."

Bomberling stood behind Herman's chair. He should really have liked to pat the boy's

Babette Bomberling

thick mop of blond hair, but now that he was a student, it probably would not do.

Herman got up, his eyes riveted to the floor.

"You haven't by any chance taken my watch; Papa?" he said. "Funny! It isn't there, nor my scarf-pin, nor my wallet. Remarkable! I can't find them anywhere."

Bomberling sat down and took up pen and paper.

"Then we'd better insert a notice in the newspapers. Tell me briefly where you were."

But that was not told so briefly. It was some time before the notice was set up.

The honest finder was given a great chance to prove himself. Not only in the turmoil of the city, but also in the vaude-villes and in the red ballrooms, in the black cabaret, in the café "Joy" and also in the café "Rose of Dawn," he might have come upon Herman Bomberling's treasures.

But time takes time. Everything works out.

When Bomberling went to investigate the

Babette Bomberling

weather the next morning, he found a canary sitting on the thermometer.

This was undoubtedly Napoleon, the First. He entered his cage. The foisted ones disappeared again.

Babette had new evidence of the falsity of men.

But she found that something special sounded in his song, since he had this adventure. The others, however, could notice nothing extraordinary, except that he was hoarse.

Herman's treasures did not return. You see they had no wings. Christian Sebold stayed away too, perhaps for similar reasons.

Instead Mr. Kippenbach was there, practically every evening. Since some time they had known that his name was William and that he did not consider a coffin a worse piece of furniture than a player-piano.

Business is business.

Whenever he came, he began with:

"Regards from my papa and little mamma."

Babette Bomberling

That bound a kindly tie from family to family.

* * * * *

Babs went to her father's factory every afternoon to study with Paul.

The first days Bomberling had asked with surprise, whether Paul had an invitation for the evening. Paul was suddenly dressed in the latest fashion—scarf and socks of the same pale lavender and waist-coat, dandified like that of Mr. Kippenbach. But he had no engagement for the evening.

So the days and hopes ran on. One tore the pages of the calendar, and was no longer concerned whether the year was old or new.

But on Bomberling's face a mental worry was pushing the broad serenity more and more aside.

There was war in the Balkans. And if this had never brought harm to coffin manufacture, it was bringing harm to Bomberling. Aunt Helen was right. If we are unlucky, we can break our fingers in our noses. Large claims remained unpaid. Stocks fell.

Babette Bomberling

But a disaster at home tortured Bomberling apparently more. This threatened his peace. The newspapers could keep him posted on the European situation, but here he stood before an enigma.

He had awakened before his usual time one morning. With closed eyes, he was puzzling over the intricate affairs of his works. Then Anna softly raised her head and asked:

“Are you asleep, August?”

Not to be disturbed, he kept quiet.

Then something horrible took place.

Anna slipped quietly out of her bed, and began to crawl heavily and yet with seeming practice, all around the room. When she had returned to her bed, a sigh burst from her lips, and she lay down to sleep again.

Ice-cold pricks crept over Bomberling's skin. He recalled forgotten fables. Bewitched toads and crown-bearing frogs. He did not remember the connection. He felt the same gruesome horror as when he was a child.

The following morning and many thereafter, he could witness the same hideous

Babette Bomberling

drama, that would now haunt his thoughts all day long.

In the bright daylight we do not believe in fairy tales. Bomberling said to himself with terror, that Anna must be unbalanced.

He recalled the past weeks. He remembered one night at the theater, when she had imagined all the young men were looking at her. There had been a bewildered vacant smile on her face all evening. Was that the beginning? He commenced watching Anna. She had grown paler and thinner. She scarcely ate. When he was out with her, she looked at all young men. At times she would exclaim vivaciously:

"Isn't he distinguished looking. I wonder who he is?"

He learned that a strange gentleman had called on Anna New Year's Day, with a bunch of roses. She had not told him anything about this. She was much more cordial to Mr. Kippenbach than Babette was, and regretted daily that Christian Sebold did not reappear.

Bomberling had no one to discuss this with. He couldn't talk to the children. He

Babette Bomberling

wouldn't to Paul, and he did not think of a doctor.

He commenced cross-questioning his business friends a bit about the mental life of their wives.

What he heard there was often not nice.

There was evidently an age, when the hearts of women do more than rejuvenate. Where women are capable of any folly. That this second youth usually came when the first gray hairs were being pulled out. At the period, when one has attained prosperity, the children are going their own way, and the servants taking care of the household. Ennui brings this misfortune.

This was a wealthy lumber magnate's solution of the physical problem.

"The best thing that can happen to husbands is to have wives become athletic. Why my wife roller-skates on our terrace all day long. That isn't the worst thing in the world."

"No indeed, that isn't the worst," said Bomberling and stared vacantly beyond the big man.

Another said:

Babette Bomberling

"That all passes. When they become grandmothers everything is all right again."

Then Bomberling began to long for Babette's marriage too. That is to say, with one side of his worried heart. The other side desired never to part from his daughter.

Thus he was in a precarious position, when an elderly gentleman introduced himself one afternoon, as the senior Kippenbach, and, after a few preliminary words, asked for Babette's hand for his son William.

Mr. Kippenbach was convinced that the children were suited to one another although he had to admit that the business of his factory stood a little behind that of Bomberling's undertaking. He emphasized regretfully that everyone in the world had to have a coffin, but by far not a pianola.

But what is not yet, may come. Anyway the young Kippenbachs should have enough to live on, and he named the sum that he thought should be Miss Bomberling's dowry.

It was a fancy figure containing a great many zeros. The sort that dances before

Babette Bomberling

one's eyes so lusciously and impressively, as the first prize in a lottery.

Two sharp pairs of eyes measured one another. Two sly business foxes smiled at each other.

"We must ask my daughter, and my wife," answered Bomberling calmly.

"Most assuredly," the other hastened to say. He had not been able to glimpse the slightest quiver in the other's features, when he mentioned the remarkable sum. That factory must stand even better than he had been informed by the secret agency. He was satisfied and impressed.

When Anna heard this news she was pleased, at first.

Then she became thoughtful, and then depressed. Her wishes had been overreached. The reality was too sudden.

This was to be decisive. No aristocrat, now when she had lost ten pounds?

Babette no longer at home with August and her, was to become a fact? Babette Kippenbach?

Anna began to weep, and threw all the responsibility of a decision on Bomberling.

Babette Bomberling

But Bomberling said no one should decide but Babette herself.

* * * * *

The seventeen-year old girl sat in her room, bent over books and papers. In the middle of the table was a bowl of snowdrops.

At business college Paul had used the books that lay before Babs. There were drawings along the margin of many a page. Reflection or abstraction may have guided Paul's hand in those days. Babette was greatly amused by them. On one page there was a little doll sucking a bottle. Paul had said that this represented her. She had been so small when he was learning in these books.

Babette studied and learnt diligently. She wanted Paul to praise her. Every afternoon he extolled her quick perceptive ability anew, whereas she admired his wide and clear knowledge. They were thoroughly satisfied with each other.

Babette was astonished when her father and mother came in together. When she

Babette Bomberling

saw their serious expressions, she was alarmed.

Now they had surely heard of her escapade with Freddy Wagner. This event of her life was a continuous torture to her.

"Don't be angry with me," she said and got up.

"But we aren't angry with you," said Anna embracing her with a great sob.

Bomberling turned hurriedly, and as though fleeing before the Spring floods, turned his back on all tears and ran out.

With great strides he wandered back and forth, from Napoleon to the clock, from the clock to Napoleon, without paying the slightest attention to the appetizing picture that hung between them.

His thoughts made him warm. He would have liked to run around in shirt-sleeves.

He was overcome with fury against all this putting on airs. This tinpan-box maker demanded a fortune as well as the privilege of stealing his child from his home. But the coffins that had made the money remained a disgrace. When he was still associating with his own kind, he had had to

Babette Bomberling

hide before no one. Simple folks know: who lives, must die. Who dies, requires a coffin. For, who buys must pay. But the swells would like life without death. They love credit.

And then Bomberling's thoughts ran on to his losses.

Now he was boiling. He tore off his collar. Never mind if Anna were shocked. He was boss here.

However, he did snatch for the collar he had flung aside, when Anna entered, followed by Babs.

And she did not see that he looked disheveled.

She had learned that Babette would never marry: that she had nothing in her mind but to study with Paul for the next few years.

And when, with much embarrassment, she had reminded Babs of her love for babies, she had been told the plan of the orphanage. She was exasperated, exhausted and discouraged.

Now Bomberling heard everything. Above all he grasped that this was a delay.

Babette Bomberling

The girl would stay with him and his worry about the dowry was postponed too. Hope had come back to him.

He smiled contentedly and gave Babette a kiss.

Babette repeated:

"Please don't be angry with me." Then she scurried back to Paul's books.

* * * * *

This evening young Kippenbach failed to come.

But the next day old Kippenbach sat before Bomberling again.

Every deed can be interpreted variously.

Babette's absolute refusal convinced him that she was hopelessly in love with his son.

"She is just a dear obstinate child. She doesn't want to admit it," said he.

And then he produced a copy of his balance sheet and proved anew how well the children were suited to each other.

He suggested that Bomberling should send his little girl on a trip. That was the thing to do in such cases. Traveling about puts you in your place.

Bomberling would not promise any-

Babette Bomberling

thing, but the suggestion bore fruit.

Not that he wished to do a favor to the piano manufacturer.

He did not fear in the least that Babette would suddenly want to become Mrs. Kippenbach on some lovely trip.

But a journey might benefit Anna's condition. Were not the doctors always prescribing this?

The atmosphere at home was murky with turbulence.

Daily he wanted to tell Anna to economize a little, "to save for an automobile." After much brooding he had thought of this pretext, but he was apprehensive of betraying himself in the discussion. He was not accustomed to insincerity with Anna.

Now he was anxious to avoid all serious discussions until Anna had regained her health. A journey might do good and would give him respite.

Thus it came about, that when Babette announced excitedly one noon that Hilda Wagner was going to accompany her aunty to Rome, Bomberling asked her whether

Babette Bomberling

she would like to go on such a trip too, with her mamma.

Instantly the baroness' words flashed into Mrs. Bomberling's mind. All the fortunate possibilities of international life? Her eyes commenced to glisten.

Babette spoke excitedly of Nero, of St. Peter's and the catacombs. Then she remembered that all the flowers blossom at once there in the Spring. Violets, lilies-of-the-valley, lilacs and roses—and now Spring was coming there.

She chattered enthusiastically.

These words made Bomberling long desperately for rest. For unworried days. His eyes looked far into space.

Then his look returned to the two blond heads of his women. Anna was already planning a bewitching traveling costume.

So the trip was a foregone conclusion.

Babette intended to continue her lessons with Paul by mail.

The joy of anticipating the trip was, however, slightly dampened for both mother and daughter.

Mrs. Bomberling had never stepped be-

Babette Bomberling

yond the borders of her country. She dreaded it.

Aunt Helen, who would have loved to take such a trip immensely, fanned these apprehensions with all her might. It was her opinion that home was the only safe place. She told of corpses in trunks, of cut-off hands in the luggage-racks, of strangled throats in long tunnels.

Suddenly, Mrs. Bomberling did not see why she must leave her peaceful home, with the safety-catches on both doors, until she recalled the international acquaintances—Russian dukes and English lords. Aunt Helen would have to make a pretty courtesy when Babette returned, the bride of an arch-duke.

Therefore she interrupted her sister-in-law's gruesome descriptions smilingly, and said:

“But Spring is marvelous down there. You can't deny that.”

With her sharp shoulders, Aunt Helen dug two holes into the air, and countered that she considered all this fuss about Spring

Babette Bomberling

ridiculous. Winter would be back in five months, anyway.

However, she had not made Mrs. Bomberling wholly sick of the trip. Anna's and Babette's traveling wardrobe had turned out too well and becoming for that.

In the mean time, Paul was checking Babette's pleasure in the trip.

He had declared lessons by mail impossible. Besides he would no longer believe that Babette would never marry. On her journey she would fall in love with the first one that came her way.

This distrust offended Babs most intensely. She turned her back on Paul, and did not return for her lessons all the last days before her departure.

Paul did not seem to miss her.

But when they were at the station and the train was about to leave, Paul suddenly stood between Bomberling and Herman at the open door. He brought a bouquet of roses for Anna and a little bunch of forget-me-nots for Babette.

"I didn't want to be rude to your

Babette Bomberling

mother," whispered Paul while he gave Babs the flowers.

"Mamma doesn't seem to have missed you at all," answered Babs, and tossed the flowers to the rest of the luggage.

The locomotive whistled.

Bomberling said to Babette:

"Take good care of mamma."

That was a joke that made them all laugh.

"Have a good time," cried Herman loudly.

"Aufwiedersehen," said Paul softly, but Babette was bending out to smile at her father.

The wheels commenced to turn. A stiff smile settled on all the faces. The station was sliding past and away from the train at steadily increasing speed.

When cool meadows flew past outside Babs took her little bunch of forget-me-nots. She straightened the bent blossoms carefully and tucked them into the V of her dress.

Anna was leaning back and examining her luggage. It looked smart. Her pride swelled.

Babette Bomberling

She listened whether the two ladies who shared the compartment with them, were remarking Babette's beauty. She was delighted to discover that she could understand none of their words. They were foreigners. One felt so cosmopolitan. Satisfied she leaned further back. Smiling, she blinked out at the world that danced past.

The hours rolled with the wheels. It darkened. The train was already rushing headlong through the black night. At intervals a cluster of lights flashed by. One house nestled against the next, and where there was light in the windows, one bed nestled against the next. The world was the same all over.

Anna was sleepy and content when they reached the city where the sleeper was attached. As she stretched herself on the narrow, trembling bed she thought of Bomberling sitting alone at the moment in the big dining-room. In that peaceful, unchanging room. At that instant she could see through a crack in the curtain, how the lights of the fleeing train played on sharp mountain gulleys. She shrank back trembling. It was really incomprehensible why

Babette Bomberling

Babette had turned down that charming young Kippenbach. How comfortably they might all be sitting together now.

"Are you asleep, Babette?" she asked.

Nothing stirred in the upper berth.

"The sleep of innocence," murmured Anna, smiling.

The wheels purred a slumber song. She fell asleep.

Her regular breaths hardly had betrayed this, when there were movements above her. Babette sat up, pushed back the curtain and stared out.

The faint moonshine indicated the way. Mountain torrents raged down, frothing furiously. Black pines soughed. The roof of a hut, lost again in the flight, told that people were creeping for shelter from the night even here. Crowns of ice glistened on the light mountain crags. Wide meadows slept serenely with their flowers, beneath the stars.

Tears dripped from Babette's eyes.

The train raced on through the night toward the southern dawn, but when the sun rose Babette had fallen asleep too.

Babette Bomberling

Neither mother nor daughter had felt that the busy wheels had stopped. That people were no longer speaking the language in which the Bomberlings communicated, outside the curtained windows.

They did not even hear the knocking.

Slowly a key turned in the lock.

The door was opened.

Anna awoke and yelled shrilly:

"Help, Murder, Help."

She had visions of Aunt Helen, and all the corpses in trunks.

The man who entered with the conductor, smilingly said a few pleasant-sounding words and made little crosses on their grips with chalk, much in the manner in which the shepherd back in Mrs. Bomberling's village used to put marks on the sheep that were to be slaughtered. Then the men had disappeared. The train started to roll on. Mrs. Bomberling had passed the boundary.

Babette had slept through it all peacefully.

"It was exceedingly simple," Mrs. Bomberling narrated afterwards in the diner, when she had swallowed a cup of strong

Babette Bomberling

coffee. "But it is just as well that it's over."

Soft meadows stretched beyond the wide windows. Spring flowers were absorbing the delicious sunshine.

"The sky is so much bluer than Paul's forget-me-nots," said Babette and tossed the wilted flowers out of the window.

When the train was leaving one of the bustling stations a stranger stepped into their compartment. He stumbled, stepped on Anna's new shoes and fell over her knee into the seat beyond. Here he tipped his hat and murmured, "Conte Spina-Spontelli."

But we never appreciate the acquaintanceships that are made too easy for us. Anna, not honoring the stranger with so much as a glance, looked severely at her new shoe, which had gotten scratched diagonally across its tip.

Not until they were a short distance from Rome did she recall that the foreigner had murmured "Conte." In a whisper she asked Babette whether conte wasn't count. The latter nodded.

Babette Bomberling

Now Anna looked cautiously at the stranger.

He smiled immediately. He asked something pleasantly in French.

As Babette did not seem to hear, Mrs. Bomberling said, pointing at her breast:

"I do not understand."

The gentleman now asked in her language, whether the blond ladies were sisters.

Anna felt that this was indeed an aristocrat. Blushing she explained that Babette was her daughter.

The latter was reading Mommsen's "Roman History." She did not look up. From the very start she would prove to Paul that the women of today keep their word.

When Anna had told where they would stay, it appeared the count was destined for the same *pension*.

Mrs. Bomberling was pleased and smiled. Entrée to the best society was so simple in distant lands. Here there was no class differentiation. Here tickets counted. First, second and third class.

And thus it came about that Mrs. Bom-

Babette Bomberling

berling rode into Rome with a real count with a double name at her side.

Babette was oblivious to everything but the heavy, warm gold of the sunshine. Fragrance of blossoms, and splashing of fountains, the ringing of chimes and the stirring melody of the foreign language penetrated her senses. Her bright eyes hung on the azure strip of sky that bound the varicolored roofs.

Mrs. Bomberling looked about curiously.

"See, how they have put up a ruin directly by the station," she exclaimed, pointing her umbrella at the mighty thermal walls, behind which Emperor Diocletian had given himself up to the delights of bathing seventeen hundred years ago.

Count Spina-Spontelli smiled and said that these ruins were not of yesterday.

Mrs. Bomberling tossed up her head and returned that she had never supposed that. That she knew very well that Rome was the eternal tourist city.

Mrs. Bomberling was on foreign soil. She realized this more distinctly with every hour.

Babette Bomberling

Not only when she stared, with her order-loving eyes, upon the disorder of the Forum Romanum, or when she discovered in the Coliseum that here it had once been considered pleasure to toss living people to the hungry lions. Not as in the movies today, but really truly.

More even than on these remarkable spots, did she realize at meals that she was far distant from Bomberling. Although they spoke in her own tongue here.

Since more than twenty years she had been accustomed to chat at her table about anything that crossed her mind, and Bomberling had been pleased with whatever his Anna had told him.

Here she no longer dared to open her mouth. Whatever she said seemed to be wrong.

Babette's place was at the other end of the table, next Hilda Wagner, through whom they had gotten into this fine *pension*.

Mrs. Bomberling's vis-à-vis was Hilda's aunt. The exclusive wife of the owner of a manorial estate, who received all communications through a black ear trumpet. And

Babette Bomberling

all around her the people were talking only of rank and title, with pursed lips that knew everything, that would not even confuse foreign words in their dreams.

The landed proprietor's lady spoke of the reigning princes as of blood relations.

"Let us hope William will get a good rest on his Northcape trip," she would say.

With that she meant the German emperor.

When salmon was served, she would sigh:

"That was Edward's favorite dish."

And meant the late King of England.

But when Mrs. Bomberling wanted to show her social ease and called down the speaking tube, that Augusta was going to take a "cure," the haughty dame yanked the tube away from her deaf ear and cried:

"Are you possibly alluding to her Majesty, the German empress?"

Evidently, we have not all the same privileges.

But what were all the reigning princelings of Hilda's aunt, compared to the many Roman emperors of whom all the other guests

Babette Bomberling

were talking, intimately and fluently as of brother Masons.

Mrs. Bomberling despaired of ever learning to distinguish these many names. Nor would she even if she should never return to her clean and orderly home. Why, she couldn't even discriminate between the plaster busts of these emperors, that were of solid marble here. They all had the same puffed-up lips and curly hair.

Only one man was familiar to her. That was Nero. That had been the name of the night-watchman's dog in her home town.

It had been a real pleasure to see a childhood bust of this Nero that very morning. He was smiling, exactly as Herman had done at five, when he had been given an apple.

For this reason she felt entitled to put in a little word of her own when they were discussing fearful atrocities of this Nero, during dessert.

"Be that as it may," she interrupted, "he must have been a charming child."

But even this raised the smile on the strange faces, that every remark of hers

Babette Bomberling

would bring now. Ever since she had presumed that the coliseum had been an antique cinematograph.

To see everything was difficult, but to remember everything was a far greater strain.

The trip was a fearful exertion anyway. From morning till night they ran about in little groups, ever to gaze upon more broken figures. Even the few young men that were along had eyes only for this old rubbish and not for Babette, who was getting prettier every day. There seemed no sense to it.

Nor did the count show up except at meals. He said that he knew Rome "like his own pockets." He might as well have added "and as the pockets of others." But Mrs. Bomberling was not to find that out until later.

You can easily see that with all this continued scampering around under the hot sun, Mrs. Bomberling was inclined to think with increasing tenderness of Babette's rejected suitor, young Kippenbach and his piano factory. Was not music the source of all joy?

They were standing before the statue of Apollo Belvedere, which the lady of the man-

Babette Bomberling

orial estates had just designated as the prototype of masculine beauty.

The pleasure derived from a work of art varies.

Mrs. Bomberling said: "I don't know, but young Mr. Kippenbach pleases me more than this Apollo. We might at least send him a picture post-card."

She poked her lorgnette to the right to tap Babette, the latter was not standing next to her at all but at a distance, wholly absorbed by the beauty before her.

However, there were marble statues that made a deep impression on Mrs. Bomberling too.

In a niche of St. Peter's, she suddenly came upon a Maria with the dead Savior on her knees. She stared long at Mother and Son. She was led to think of the New Year's Morn when Herman hadn't come home. Hot tears ran down her cheeks.

And she did not even know that it was a masterpiece of Michael Angelo's.

Sheer horror gripped her before the group of Laocoön. The bearded man struggling in vain to escape the awful snakes, bore a

Babette Bomberling

resemblance to Bomberling. She stared at the group with fear and horror, while the lady of the manorial estates reverently whispered to her that this was something particularly beautiful.

When she was back in her room hot and exhausted, she read up what her guide-book had to say about this snake man.

One of the many gods that were supposed to exist formerly, had sent the vile snake upon the neck of the man and his young sons, out of pure revenge.

She feared for Bomberling, who was so deserted.

And when she lay down for her noon nap, it was a source of deep comfort to her that there was only one God today, and snakes only in the most wild and remote regions.

Babs would put down her impressions of the trip while her mother slumbered. And that, in truth, for Paul.

A few postal cards had created a bridge. Now they exchanged daily letters.

Paul knew the monuments of art as though he were born in Rome. His letters were minutely detailed guides. From them

Babette Bomberling

Babette felt the intense yearning her friend had for this city of wonders. Thus it came about that she had to think of Paul with every beautiful thing she saw.

After visiting the Sistine chapel, she had asked him whether he knew anything of Michael Angelo's mother? It must be an infinite joy to have presented such a man to the world. But one had to be a woman worthy of this honor.

Today Paul had answered, he believed that very simple people could have remarkable children, if only their innermost wishes are not low, but are big and splendid. For children are the desires of their parents come to life.

As for example—he could well imagine that his son might bring the great gift of artistic achievement, for which he himself had longed so desperately, as a finished talent into the world.

And then he begged to be pardoned for having gone so into detail, on a subject that could have only a purely theoretical interest for Babette, who would never marry.

But Babs had reread this letter repeated-

Babette Bomberling

ly. He had thoroughly upset her happy, animated thoughts.

That Paul should consider love and marriage and even children for himself, had never crossed her thoughts. She had considered him much too fastidious for that.

Now she suspected that he was secretly engaged.

She got out his previous letters and sat down by the window that gave her a wide view of the somber Campagna.

Actually. Every letter bore some remark about love or belonging together.

It was evident. He loved someone.

Babs realized that her duty as a friend demanded that she call Paul's attention to the dangers of marriage and to prevent his becoming an ordinary family papa. He was too good for that.

An honest rage at the modern young girl's craze to get married rose in her.

In the meanwhile she postponed the answer to this very important letter. Instead she wrote into her diary in black letters:

"The fate of lonesomeness is destined for me."

Babette Bomberling

As she was about to reread the beautifully sounding sentence, a knock sounded on the door.

The chambermaid announced that a friend of the ladies Bomberling was calling. Babette stepped into the reception-room of the *pension*.

There stood Christian Sebold in the glory of his most beautifully striped vest, and crushed her little hand in hearty greeting.

From Aunt Helen, Christian Sebold had heard that Babette refused an offer of marriage. Hence her heart was no longer free.

This had surprised Aunt Helen immensely, for Babette only knew Christian Sebold besides that young man.

Christian had brushed up his vigorous moustache, and said to himself that between Bologna and Naples, between Mortadella and Salami, lies Rome. He had made a little business trip.

Here he was.

Mrs. 'Bomberling was awakened. She was much touched to see someone here in this queer land, who knew Bomberling and

Babette Bomberling

Aunt Helen and her whole precious "at home."

She pressed Sebold's mighty hand heartily. She would have liked most to say "yes" immediately; for what else could have brought the fine young man so far?

Sebold intended to spend three days in Rome. He knew exactly what he wished to see.

First, the buffalo herds in the Campagna. Second, the gruesome prisons of the persecuted Christians, away under the earth. Third, a real Italian vaudeville.

This very afternoon he wanted to visit several of the catacombs. If possible, those where there were plenty of skeletons.

When he renewed the acquaintance of Hilda Wagner at tea, and was introduced to her aunt of the manorial estates, he included these ladies in the invitation to take a drive with him.

As they rode down the Via Appia, the lady of the estates said sadly:

"How Letitia loved to drive along here at this hour."

With that she meant Napoleon's mother,

Babette Bomberling

who had died three-quarters of a century ago.

Christian Sebold's glance was following a fleeing buffalo. Aloud, he reckoned the number of pounds of sausage such a beast would give.

Mrs. Bomberling looked alarmed in the direction of the haughty dame. She feared this coarse topic would offend the refined lady.

But the lady still held the hearer to her ear, and smiled as though she had heard something exceptionally pleasant. For this Mr. Sebold came in the nick of time for her.

This morning they had written her that Hilda's brother Fred had received his discharge and slipped off to America, without honor or money, but with a cloak model.

With that, poor Hilda's chances of making a suitable match were destroyed for the time being. Now she would be lucky if she were married off at all.

This sausage manufacturer was wealthy, something that was perhaps more practical today than ancestors. They themselves

Babette Bomberling

had prestige and connections, would simply have him made a Privy Councillor with some big donation.

And again, smiling across at Mr. Sebold, she said:

“August is extraordinarily interested in cattle raising, too.”

And meant the King of Saxony.

Christian Sebold was immensely flattered to be brought into such close relation to the highest personalities.

Hilda Wagner pleased him more with every hour.

He hoped he pleased her, too. He could afford to forego a dowry. If he might then belong to this fine family, for whom his mother had had to do menial service!

From whose kitchen, he had hungrily devoured the leftovers, when he was a child.

He prolonged his stay. They made excursions. It got warmer from day to day.

Mrs. Bomberling suffered a lot from the heat. She longed to go home, but she did not want to impede her own aspirations. That Christian Sebold was paying much attention to Hilda did not bother her in the

Babette Bomberling

least. No one was more desirable than Babette. But she had her doubts whether the sausage maker had not made his long trip in vain, for nowadays the count with the hard-to-remember double name was always along. And wherever he was, another young man, who called himself Dr. Hilpert, was sure to appear.

Countess Babette—Mrs. Dr. Babette—

Mrs. Bomberling worried through many hours, with plans and euphonious words—she reflected what would be better, what would sound better.

Bomberling had written several times whether they weren't coming home. He was tired and feared he was going to be sick without his Anna near him. Anna's heart became heavy. But she couldn't leave. They would have to remain at least another week.

Mother love is stronger than any other kind.

Babette had now rendered Paul the great service of friendship, and warned him against marriage in a lengthy epistle. She had called his attention to the fact that most

Babette Bomberling

girls get fat and quarrelsome when married. That a married man isn't a man at all.

Her mood became merry again after she had dispatched this letter. Accomplished duties bring joy.

Whereas Hilda Wagner went about with tear-stained eyes.

She had been informed of her brother's nasty folly. When she told Babette of this misfortune with tears, the latter began to weep, too.

They sat in the salon of the *pension*, in front of the Chinese screen under several potted palms, and Babette confessed between sobs what a sad adventure she had had with Lieutenant Freddy. How, due to him, she had sworn never to trust any man.

"Poor Babs," said Hilda, tenderly. "But you will be all the happier with some one else. I, however"—and she sobbed again—"I shall have to be the fifth wheel all my life. With this scandal on the honor of the family, I shall never get a husband."

"I'll bet you do get one," a strong voice

Babette Bomberling

said from behind the Chinese screen, and, upset by all the maidenly despair, Christian Sebold came stamping out from his hiding-place. Without any fuss, he gathered slim Hilda against his wide, gay vest.

Never before had the lady of the manorial estates, beamed with such graciousness and equality into Mrs. Bomberling's face as at the moment when she acknowledged Anna's congratulations.

But that was cold comfort for Mrs. Bomberling. Her Babette had been slighted. That hurt bitterly.

In Cicero's Tusculum, she explained once more in detail the vast size of her husband's factory to the count and to the young doctor. She declared that, at home Babette was surrounded by suitors as here the flowers by gnates and flies.

And on her return from this expedition she sent a card, which pictured the whole of Rome, with a friendly greeting to young Mr. Kippenbach.

In the evening she again gathered all her energy to creep at least once around the room. Of late she had been neglecting her

Babette Bomberling

“cure” a bit. With horror this was recalled to her today, when the Count remarked that in his family there was no corpulence. That fine races do not put on flesh.

Breathless, the faithful mother lay in bed at last.

Then she took her guide-book and tried to memorize the seven hills of Rome: “Aventine, Esquiline, Capitoline——”

It was hard! But even the doctor was a well-educated man. He would surely appreciate the value of such knowledge.

Babette wanted to kiss her mother good-night, but sneaked away when she heard the murmuring. She did not wish to disturb her mother’s prayers.

“Aventine, Esquiline, Capitoline, Palantine.” At last she put out the light. She thought it would have been much simpler if they had built this Rome on a flat field as so many other pleasant cities. The name of the seventh hill had again escaped her.

Dreams carry us to strange lands. Yet Mrs. Bomberling had not wholly lost reality, when she sprang up from her slum-

Babette Bomberling

bers. Something had moved in the room.

By the light of the night lamp she saw Count Spina-Spontelli step out of the wardrobe door.

"Is it you Count?" asked Mrs. Bomberling pleasantly. And wondered that the Count should come to ask for Babette's hand at such an unearthly hour.

Then to her horror she saw the Count draw a revolver.

At the same moment, however, another man stepped out of the door behind that wardrobe. Babette's second suitor, charming Dr. Hilpert. Before Mrs. Bomberling could make out which of the two she would prefer as a son-in-law, Dr. Hilpert had snatched the revolver from Count Spina-Spontelli and snapped handcuffs on his wrists.

"Pardon the slight disturbance—you will be informed of everything in the morning," said he with a bow towards Mrs. Bomberling's bed.

Then both men had disappeared.

But Mrs. Bomberling had no time to wait. She shrieked and rang, till the entire

Babette Bomberling

pension was aroused. That very night they all heard the entire story. The count was a long sought swindler with the easily pronounceable name of Weber. In Dr. Hilpert, however, they had had a clever secret-service man as an acquaintance. Verily, on a journey there are adventures.

They all surrounded Mrs. Bomberling and congratulated her on her fortunate rescue. With tears in her eyes she received these many kindnesses.

Other causes; other good wishes.

No one went to bed again that night. Tea was prepared and gradually the gathering developed into a jolly little party. Conversation was lively from the very start. Each one had a special anecdote about swindlers and hotel thieves to narrate.

Hilda Wagner slipped her slim hands into Sebold's big fist. She knew she had a protector on this uncertain earth now.

Only Mrs. Bomberling and Babette had no share in this general fun. They were packing. Mrs. Bomberling wanted to leave with the first morning train.

She had no further use for this place.

Babette Bomberling

The telegram for dear Bomberling was written already.

Morning came. It got light. But Mrs. Bomberling did not calm down until she sat in the train. When the wheels started, she was overcome with emotion. Her face buried in her handkerchief, she sobbed:

“Even Napoleon will have changed in this long, long time.”

Babette's glances sought the curve of a great dome, that stayed further and further behind in the bright sunshine.

Bomberling sat in his office and looked through his morning mail.

Several telegrams that he had hastily opened confirmed his fears.

The work of his life could be held no longer.

The peace of Europe was fragile. There were no longer any bonds or cash to bridge this difficult period.

Slowly he opened Mrs. Bomberling's last letter from Rome. In all these troublesome weeks Anna had written only of things which had never concerned his life—on which he had never spent a thought. These

Babette Bomberling

letters dwelt on bathing establishments of long-gone Roman Emperors, of water-works that had crumbled and were out of order since the birth of Christ, or of damaged marble statues.

And unfortunately also of attractive young men.

Today's writing did not vary from the former ones. First, Anna told of the marvelous bathing arrangements of an Emperor Hadrian, then, besides the Italian count, who was always mentioned, a charming young doctor was lauded.

Anna did not as yet seem to have recovered.

* * * * *

Outside the rain was splashing down. The sky was as gray as in Autumn. Spring should have come long ago. But this year nothing was as it should be.

A hopeless dejection settled on Bomberling. He could see no comforting ray. Only the tenaciously unpardoning demands of an endless drudgery hung over him.

Anna and Babette would return, still finer ladies than when they had left. Some

Babette Bomberling

slicked-up foreigner would come and fetch Babette and demand funds. Money that no longer existed. And Herman? At the end of the month he would lightly confess another new little burden of debts that his father was to pay. To tell the boy: "It's over." To hear Anna's awful howl when she discovered that they were again in the position in which they had been when they were married. He was no longer young enough for that.

Bomberling opened his desk slowly. He got out the policy that insured his life at a high figure. In these times there was many a man who understood how to help his dear ones at the right moment to their only salvation.

He commenced to read the conditions through. But the letters twitched and twirled and became confused.

As with a bolt, a fact suddenly struck him that he had never noticed before. The great big building, in the midst of which he sat, was filled with waiting coffins.

His throat was being strangled by an insane craving for air, he longed for light, for

Babette Bomberling

Anna's blond hair, the laughter of his children and all the past comfort and happiness. Boiling, his blood rushed into his aching head, where numbers topped numbers, towering into mathematical problems that could never be solved.

When the bookkeeper brought the wire that announced Anna's and Babs's coming, he found Bomberling on the floor, breathing heavily.

* * * * *

By the sparseness of the fields they could see that they were nearing the metropolis. Mrs. Bomberling scrambled among her bags. She wanted to make sure that none of the pretty things she was bringing her dear August were broken.

First she unwrapped a little marble figure. It was the Esquiline Venus, parlor size. Bomberling was to put her on his desk. Even if he were not interested in art, he would have to acknowledge how praiseworthy it is that someone could imitate the human form so accurately.

A second packet contained a small cast of the Roman she-wolf with the sucking

Babette Bomberling

boys, Romulus and Remus. When she bought it, she had really been under the impression that the children were a boy and a girl. Because she had thought that the wolf represented the nurse of Romeo and Juliet. These old tales were always being confused. But Bomberling would be pleased with it this way, too.

She could scarce wait till she might unburden all her new knowledge to him, and at last be able to chatter freely again.

The train thundered into the terminal. Her eyes brimming with tears, Mrs. Bomberling waved her handkerchief to the black crowd that was waiting there.

At last they descried Paul in the swarming mass.

There were sharp lines about his mouth, and he attempted an ineffective smile. He said Bomberling was in bed, suffering from a slight cold. Herman had stayed with him.

Pleasantly excited, Anna talked animatedly of camomile tea and locorice syrup. She would have her Bomberling cured in a jiffy. Now she was back at last.

But when Herman burst on her at the

Babette Bomberling

apartment door, crying like a baby, exactly as he had done when in his boyhood his pet squirrel had died—then she knew that something terrible must have happened.

She ran into the bedroom.

Bomberling rested with closed eyes under the protection of the chubby gilded angel that he had carved himself. Numbers and figures passed over his damp, bluish lips. He was reckoning and calculating.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bomberling's life had changed between two breaths.

She had forgotten that the world was full of distinguished and wealthy young men, to be converted into sons-in-law.

She did not feel Aunt Helen's bony arm around her shoulders and comforting explanations that everyone must work himself to death in order to live.

She was not flattered when her friend, the widow, approached her, weepingly offered to call her by her first name and recalled that her late lamented had to lie on his bed of pain fifteen years only to be forced to arise when the Almighty called.

Babette Bomberling

It was all as inconsequent to her as the seven difficult names of the seven Roman hills which had escaped her again.

She wanted nothing further than that Bomberling should open his eyes and say "Mousy."

She waited for this and she would not budge from his bed by day or night.

She did not notice the lines being drawn in Babette's soft face.

She did not see Herman sitting among his books like a great, helpless boy, his eyes all swollen. She wouldn't endure anyone in the room.

The grown-up children seemed strangers to her. For in the void of the long hours, while she caressingly brushed Bomberling's tangled hair that had gotten thin and gray, in order to renew the ice bags, she saw her August, as he had come to fetch her for marriage, young, with blond hair and laughing eyes. What did the children know of that?

While she sat silently beside the heavily breathing man, her thoughts skipped into the past.

Babette Bomberling

The crack of a whip outside reminded her so vividly of the bright summer morning when they sat in the carriage, the colored boxes of linen on behind and the unknown monster city ahead.

The cry of a child recalled the nights when Bomberling, whistling softly, would carry shrieking Herman, so that his Anna might slumber. The great day came back to her, too, when August had laughingly pinched her cheek and said:

"Now we belong in the front row. The finest people will have to bow to our children some day."

First she had thought he was joking. But then she had wept for joy.

"Silly, vain goosy," he had scolded her. But laughed broadly therewith, and, heavy as she was, he had picked her up and swung her around the room.

With a smile about her mouth, she got up to renew the bandage on the old man's burning forehead.

Then she dreamt on in the quiet, darkened room.

She remembered distinctly when they

Babette Bomberling

moved into a more fashionable street, how she distributed a lot of her old furniture among her delighted neighbors. But after that period her memory came upon a gap. It was as though August had not been with them from there on. Only the children were there. The children.

For this reason her memory always turned back here.

They were paving the street below. The heavy blows took her back to the smithy.

Thus the hours passed by.

Until one bright morning, when Bomberling opened his eyes and with a heavy tongue, said:

“Anna?”

Then he fell asleep again. But his breath came more regularly.

Shortly after that Paul rapped gently on the door of the quiet room. He begged Mrs. Bomberling to come for a brief conference.

Several things required her signature.

She took her place at the large dining-table, between Babette and Herman. Paul

Babette Bomberling

paced the room excitedly. The rest of the apartment seemed to have died out.

Mrs. Bomberling was smiling.

"He has opened his eyes and recognized me," she said. Her smile deepened. She seemed to lose herself in her smile—the children wept.

"The situation is actually this," began Paul—"the factory has been shut down. There is the possibility that—that—a great deal of money will be lost—that your circumstances will—suffer a severe change, dearest Auntie."

"How long I hadn't seen his eyes! They were really not changed a bit." Mrs. Bomberling was murmuring with the same smile playing about her mouth.

Then she looked up. She felt some answer was expected of her. She said:

"Do whatever you think best. You are clever and well-trained. When papa is well again he will put everything to rights."

She got up.

"Perhaps he'll awaken again soon. Then I must be there."

She went out on tiptoe. Smiling.

Babette Bomberling

"She doesn't even look at us any more," sobbed Babs, and threw herself over the table.

"Possibly we don't understand what it means to be man and wife," said Paul slowly, looking earnestly at Babette.

Then Herman sneaked out and left the two alone.

Life hurries on and does not wait. We have to put ourselves to an effort if we want to keep up a little longer.

Bomberling had recognized Anna sitting by his bed. He gathered all his strength to return to consciousness.

He groped a little nearer health daily.

He sat up in bed; in a chair at his side sat Anna. On the night table stood the *Esquiline Venus*, next the Roman she-wolf.

One morning a letter lay among these. It contained a few lines from Herman. He told his father not to worry about him, he would gladly give up studying. Father should do naught but get well.

All this day he did not show up at the bedside.

Babette Bomberling

Bomberling should have liked to tell him that he was happy that his big, learned boy still cared for him.

But now he attempted to catch up with life again with the first faltering steps. His old energy helped him in this. Soon he could shuffle to the balcony. He would sit between the pelargonia and the canary cage, staring into the blue sky or watching Anna, who was sewing.

It was May. Napoleon was warbling his songs as though he were swinging on a blossoming lilac twig.

Mrs. Bomberling had also awakened to life again.

"I am surprised young Mr. Kippenbach does not inquire about you," said she.

"Pray don't begin to think," answered Bomberling, closing his eyes. He seemed to be slumbering. In reality, however, he was calculating, secretly. Since days he had been at this labor again. He knew Paul was endeavoring to save the firm. He was trying to form a stock company. An unknown force seemed to have called forth gigantic strength in the boy.

Babette Bomberling

One day, when Mrs. Bomberling had gone out to secure the first strawberries for her August, she found he had escaped on her return. Before she had realized what had happened, the telephone rang and Bomberling's quiet voice said:

"Don't worry. I'm at the office, working with Paul."

"My, but you're a man!" Anna gasped in reply. But Bomberling had already hung up.

Anna kept roaming excitedly about their big apartment. At half-hour intervals she would call up the mill and ask how Bomberling was feeling.

Babette, who had been helping Paul all these weeks, answered her mother patiently and tenderly each time, that father was very well.

Her voice sounded so fresh and young.

Mrs. Bomberling sighed. She went on the balcony and looked across to the Kippenbach's windows. Perhaps she might bring back the old relations a bit, with a friendly nod.

Babette Bomberling

But all the shutters were closed as though the very windows were offended.

Mrs. Bomberling sighed again, and when she went to the telephone this time, she impulsively called up the number of the Baroness Pryczsbitsky-Ratzoska.

The baroness answered immediately—that she had heard of all their misfortunes with deep sympathy.

Mrs. Bomberling replied that in Rome an Italian count had almost committed suicide because Babette wouldn't have him.

The baroness renewed her expressions of sympathy. Real Italian counts were a much-sought article. Otherwise this was a dull period. The season for traveling had commenced, then everybody tried his own fortune at hunting. She only had little Prill still on hand. He had not yet succeeded in finding a mortgage for his five-story house.

Mrs. Bomberling returned that she had meant nothing of that sort, but had only wanted to say how-do-you-do to her charming friend.

The Baroness Pryczsbitzky - Ratzoska thanked her for her graciousness, and added

Babette Bomberling

that she regretted that she was now obliged to charge for even the shortest telephone consultations. She would permit herself to send a little bill.

Mrs. Bomberling hung up the receiver with alacrity. There, she had been wasteful again, although she was to save at every nook and corner.

She was rather depressed when the others returned home.

She looked sadly beyond Bomberling and Herman, and Paul and Babette. There was no ray of hope for a son-in-law.

And she wasn't cheered when Aunt Helen came to inquire after Bomberling and told that Hilda Wagner and Sebold would marry soon.

She said:

"If someone might sometimes see how it will some time be, someone would sometimes be less finicky."

Mrs. Bomberling replied that Babette was incomparably prettier than Hilda and thoroughly serious-minded as well.

Aunt Helen said kindly, that Mrs. Bomberling's words must not be taken amiss.

Babette Bomberling

That even the owl finds her young beautiful.

And then she commenced singing Paul's praises.

They had offered him the directorship of the newly-to-be-formed company.

"Yes," she declared, "if that were my son, I should be proud of him."

Years bring forgetting. Aunt Helen no longer knew that she had renounced offensively, the day Paul was offered each member of the family as an heritage. She had declared that she would not let anyone present her with a child as a testamentary obligation. Upon whomever God wished to bestow offspring, He would present them in the natural way.

She was right. Nature will always be the greatest blessing.

But today she was remembering none of these things, and no one was there to refresh her recollections, for Mrs. Bomberling had fallen asleep. The grievous words had made her unconscious. Her head was bent sidewise. The carefully built-up coiffure had slipped. The light from the

Babette Bomberling

chandelier plainly showed where the blond hair had given place to silver streaks.

A few days later, just when Mrs. Bomberling was elated at having saved ten pfennings at the butcher's, a little letter was handed to her. She presumed that it was a message from young Kippenbach. Or a secret sign from someone made giddy by Babette's beauty.

It was the baronesse's bill.

One consultation on the telephone—ten marks.

Furthermore there was a letter in a sealed envelope. On this was written: Important hints for the summer season.

This would cost ten marks also, but might be returned to the messenger unopened.

Mrs. Bomberling hesitated. This sealed letter fascinated her. Ten marks were a lot of money—raised the bill to twenty. But should one begin skimping on Babette? On that sweet child? Who was helping from morn till night—so faithfully and diligently?

Babette Bomberling

She hastily paid the messenger twenty marks and kept the important hints.

Before she had been able to open these however, the door was unlatched and Bomberling returned, accompanied by Paul and Babette. At an altogether unusual hour—for it was only mid-afternoon.

Alarmed, Mrs. Bomberling slipped the envelope into her bag.

But the arrivals looked as though they were concealing some secret between them.

"Allow me to introduce Director Paul Bomberling to you, my dear," said August, ceremoniously, and tapped his way to the armchair.

Anna had to sit down, too, when she heard that the factories would be continued with Paul at the head. They would produce artistic cabinet work and the stock of coffins would gradually be given up.

"I'll skip out," announced Babette when a momentous silence ensued, and disappeared swiftly.

She had flowers on her arm for the first time since her return. Lilies-of-the-valley and anemones.

Babette Bomberling

"You see," said Bomberling to Anna, "now you will have at least a nephew with a title."

Mrs. Bomberling looked up at Paul. He wore a cutaway and appeared formal and changed.

"Who would have thought it," she murmured.

Bomberling continued:

"That ought to comfort you, now that I am nothing more than an old household piece. And Herman will be able to continue his studies. Only Babette will be in the way and make housekeeping unnecessarily expensive."

He blinked from Anna to Paul.

Anna did not see this. Her eyes brimmed with tears.

She found it disgraceful of August to speak in this way of Babs before this new, smart Paul.

With a flushed face she declared she would sell the English salon pieces, the Russian cups and various other things. That sum would make a dowry. Babette should have a suitor on every finger if she liked.

Babette Bomberling

The recollection of the "important hints for the summer season" came as a boon to her, too.

But suddenly Babette was back, kissing her rapturously. Paul looked yet more formal and Bomberling seemed quite rotund with happiness. And at last she realized that Babette had already accepted a suitor, and that it was Paul whom everyone would know now as "director."

She sat quite inert, stooping slightly, her thoughts running in confusion.

She might have saved those twenty marks, she thought. Even the trip to Rome! What would Aunt Helen say? And her friend, the widow? And now in the month of May Babette was affianced! And no need for embarrassment about the coffins. No stranger would take her away from them. Why, already when a mere child, Paul had watched over her faithfully. And she herself might eat anything again? Might give up the creeping without any pangs of conscience?

Again and again everything tumbled to-

Babette Bomberling

gether in her mind. Joy streamed through her like hot coffee.

When Bomberling asked her if she were not delighted, she nodded heavily.

She did not brace up until Aunt Helen plunged into the room to find out whether what she had heard from Uncle Albert were true.

Then she wiped her forehead and scolded about the intolerably hot May weather.

Mrs. Bomberling said with dignity:

“You see now Paul is also my son. And Babette will be a director’s wife.”

Aunt Helen continued dabbing her brow with her handkerchief, and congratulating. And then she said that she had just read in the paper that modern mothers no longer cared whether their daughters got husbands or not. That at last one was past that—

But that must have been an error, because there are no modern mothers. There are only mothers.

THE END

